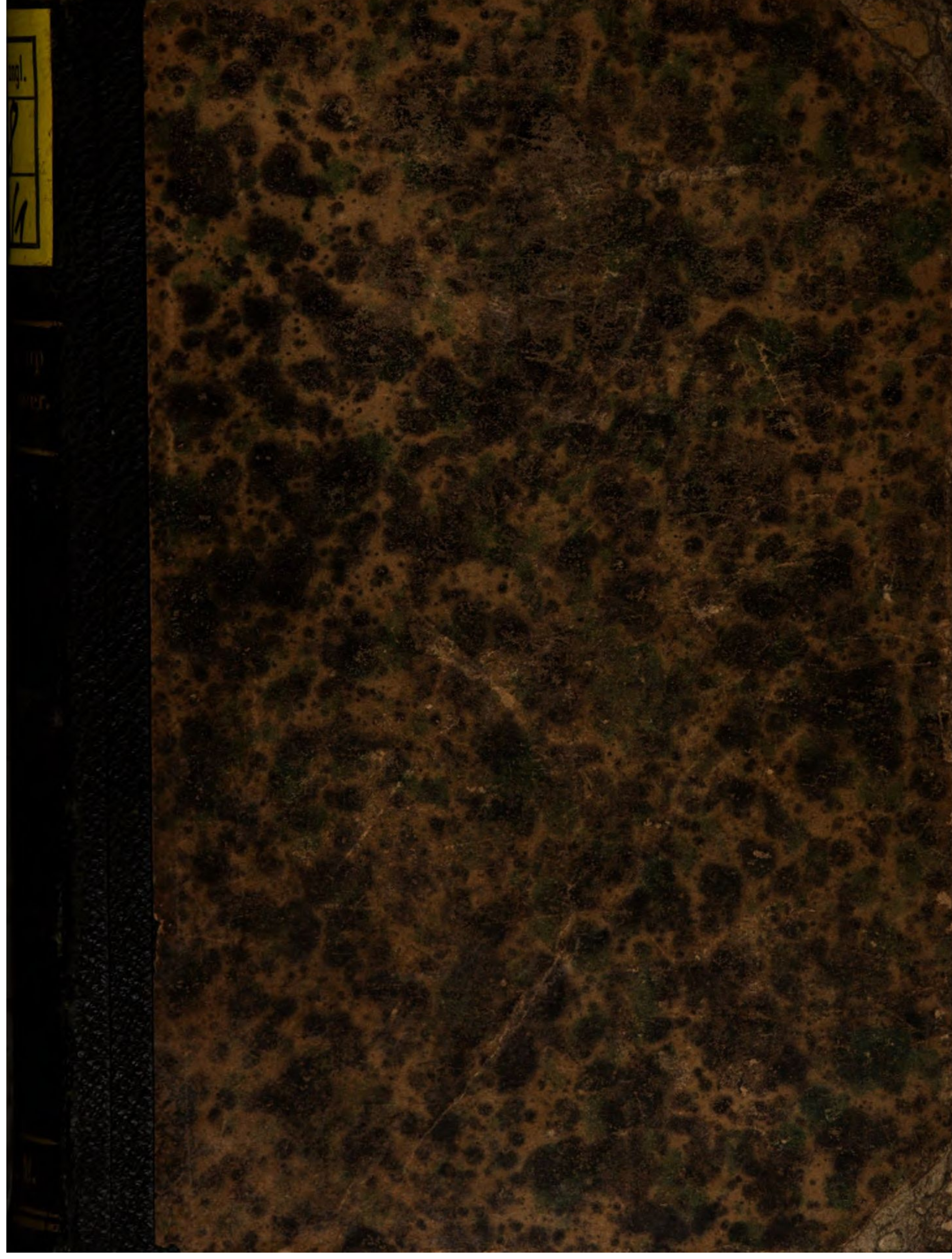






P.O. angl.

380

(1)

Flower

(Broughton)











COLLECTION  
OF  
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 911.

---

COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.

IN ONE VOLUME.



COMETH

UP AS A FLOWER



“Is the old man yet alive?”

COLLECTED EDITION

COMETH UP AS A FLOWER

IN ONE VOLUME

LEITNIG

BERNARD TAUCHNITZ

1887

The Right of Translation is reserved.



COMETH  
UP AS A FLOWER.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

*COPYRIGHT EDITION.*

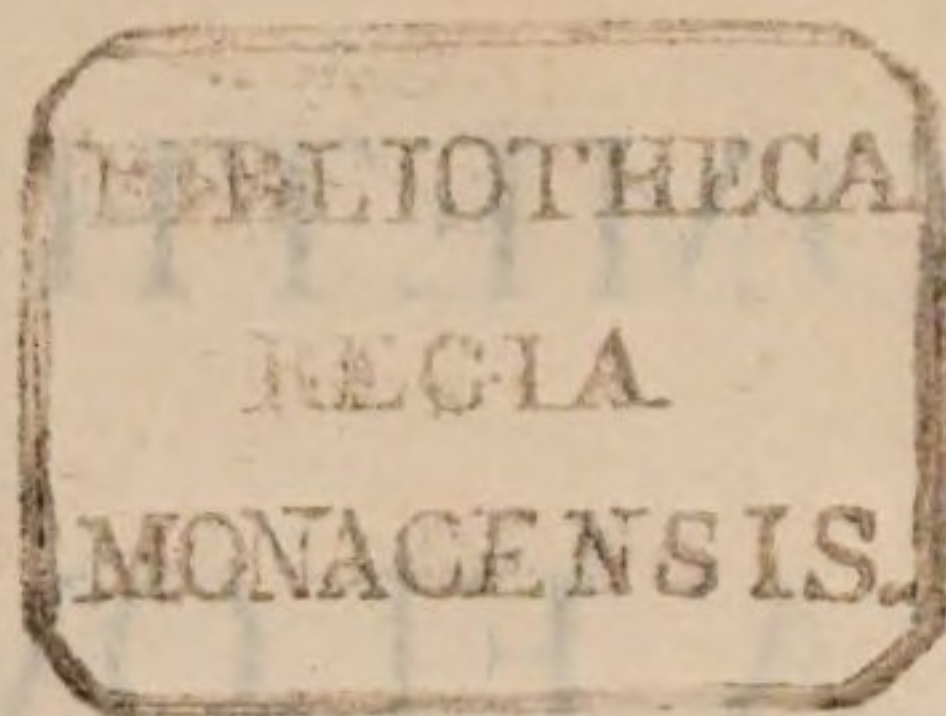
LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1867.

*The Right of Translation is reserved.*





AFFECTIONATE REGARD

BY

THE AUTHOR



TO  
JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU,

THIS TALE IS INSCRIBED  
AS A SMALL TOKEN OF  
AFFECTIONATE REGARD

BY

THE AUTHOR.



# COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.

## CHAPTER I.

When I die, I'll be buried under that big old ash tree over yonder -- the one that Dolly and I cut our names on with my jagged old pocket-knife nine, ten years ago now. I utterly reject and abdicate my reserved seat in the family ancestral tomb. I don't see the fun of undergoing one's dusty transformation between a mouldering grandpa and a mouldered great-grandpa. Every English gentleman or lady likes to have a room to themselves when they are alive. Why not when they are dead? Yes, when they are dead, make a decent ending has come, I'll have a snug hole grubbed for me right under my old friend the ash (the near one, isn't it?) and there I'll make myself as comfortable as circumstances will permit amongst the lobbies, and the woodlice, &c. And Dolly (if she survives me, as I hope she won't, and as I'm sure she will) shall plant a rose at my head, and a gillyflower at my feet, and daisy-dandelions on each side of me, and there I'll sleep as sound as a top, and not dream a bit, whatever Hamlet says to the contrary.

These remarks I made to no other audience than myself, consequently they were received without any marks of dissent. I did not say them aloud, but



## COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.

---

### CHAPTER I.

“WHEN I die, I’ll be buried under that big old ash tree over yonder — the one that Dolly and I cut our names on with my jagged old penknife nine, ten years ago now. I utterly reject and abdicate my reserved seat in the family mausoleum. I don’t see the fun of undergoing one’s dusty transformation between a mouldering grandpapa and a mouldered great-grandpapa. Every English gentleman or lady likes to have a room to themselves when they are alive. Why not when they are dead? Yes, when my time to make a decent ending has come, I’ll have a snug hole grubbed for me right under my old friend the ash (the near one, isn’t it?) and there I’ll make myself as comfortable as circumstances will permit amongst the lobbies, and the woodlice, &c. And Dolly (if she survives me, as I hope she won’t, and as I’m sure she will) shall plant a rose at my head, and a gillyflower at my feet, and daffydowndillies on each side of me, and there I’ll sleep as sound as a top, and not dream a bit, whatever Hamlet says to the contrary.”

These remarks I made to no other audience than myself, consequently they were received without any marks of dissent. I did not say them aloud; for,



within my experience, people do not soliloquise at the top of their voices, save at Drurylane and Covent-garden, but, as it were, to my *Philon Heter*, or dear heart. And as I soliloquised I leaned the rather frayed elbows of my venerable holland frock on the top of the low stone wall that parted our big hay meadow (the largest of the fields belonging to the Grange) from the churchyard. It was the pleasantest hour, videlicet 9 P.M., of one of the pleasantest days of the pleasantest month in the whole year, May. There had not been a breath of wind all day, but at sundown a little whiff had arisen from no one knew where, except that from its fragrance and velvet softness, one felt sure that its original home must have been heaven. Rejoicing in it, the elms were waving their topmost crowns, and talking to one another, low and stately, in their own language, which none but themselves and the wind can comprehend. I think they were telling each other how strong the spring sap was running through their leafy veins, and how grateful was the touch of the dew-freshened flowers about their gnarled feet. And the grass, not green now, but clad by twilight in dim silver gray, was talking too, as any one might see, who watched its blades and spears bowing and swaying to catch each other's confidences.

Ours was a churchyard that it would have been a real luxury to be buried in. It inspired one with no horrible, hardly even melancholy ideas. One never thought of skulls or cross-bones, or greedy worms, while looking at those turfy mounds sloping so softly; those mounds that the westering sun always gave his last good-night kiss to before he went to bed behind the craggy purple hill. Were one really dead, stowed



away in one's appointed oak-box, it would concern one, no doubt, not a whit whether one were huddled with other oak boxes into some ghastly pit, among the dark be-nettled grass of some city charnel, or laid down reverently in the fragrant earth, shadowed by some peaceable little gray church tower, such as ours was. But while one is yet alive, and one's oak box is as yet not a box at all, but the trunk of some branchy tree, one cannot realize this. Unconsciously we fancy that we shall smell the odorous mignonette and carnations that are revelling in the summer sunshine above our heads, that we shall hear the birds preaching our funeral sermons, and singing their own epithalamiums, when spring comes back, that we shall shiver in the snow, and be chilled by the wintry rains.

During my meditations, my elbows had grown quite numb with resting so long on the cold stone, and of this I at length became aware. I raised them from their uneasy position, and rubbed them slowly and affectionately.

"I wish I were in the churchyard," said I (to myself, as before). "I could sit so comfortably on old Mrs. Barlow's big flat tombstone, and perhaps I might be inspired to compose an elegy that would make Gray's hide its diminished head. If Dolly were here she would say it was indelicate and unladylike for a grown-up woman to be scrambling over walls. But as Dolly is not here, to the winds with gentility! There's nobody to see me except a few bats, and perhaps a ghost or two."

And so I clambered over, and got coated with lichens in the process, and made for Mrs. Barlow's tomb, sat down upon it, and fell into a reverie. I had



read all the inscriptions scores of times; they were of the usual type,

"Affliction sore long time I bore," &c.,

decidedly bearing away the palm of popularity. Just opposite to me was an upright stone, with the somewhat halting, but highly impressive poetic effort, which is to be found in every graveyard over England, inscribed upon it —

"When the Archangel's trump shall sound,  
And souls to bodies join,  
Thousands shall wish their stay on earth  
Had been as short as mine."

For the twentieth time I was perusing this gloomy prophecy, supposed to be spoken by an infant of tender years, and was marvelling whether the gifted but unknown author intended the rhyme to be "*join* and *moine*," or "*jine* and *mine*," when I was startled by hearing the lych gate behind me swing on its hinges. I turned my head round with a jerk, and the archangel and the prophetic baby went out of my head together. In the waning light I saw the figure of a man. If he were a ghost he was a very substantial one, besides a ghost would not have banged the gate, and oh! I never heard of a ghost that whistled Meyerbeer's "Shadow Air!" It could not be the sexton, for he was a hump-backed sexagenarian, who would as soon have thought of burying himself in one of his own graves as of courting rheumatism amid the damp dewes of a May evening. It could not be any one of the John Smiths or Robert Browns of the parish; for besides that the bumpkins in our parts are not given to indulging in the sentimental melancholy of pilgrimages to the tombs of their respective Betsys, and Anns, and Marthas, one



glance, even though the light was waning, sufficed to show me that the new comer was a gentleman. He did not appear to have seen me at first, as he stood there in the church path, with his hands in his pockets, and a meerschaum in his mouth, "viewing the landscape o'er."

I cannot bear being in the company of a person who is not aware of my proximity. I always experience something of the guilty feeling of a spy or eaves-dropper, so I coughed gently, to hint to him that there was a young woman perched, ghoul-like, on a grave-stone in his vicinity. Having so coughed, I was overcome with shyness, and durst not look round again, to watch the result of my manœuvre. I suppose it succeeded, for he certainly manifested no signs of surprise, as he came close by me, in his deliberate saunter towards the church.

"What is he like?" asked the inquisitiveness of nineteen within my breast. "What's that to you?" said Decorum. "Everything," returned Inquisitiveness. I must have one peep. I had one peep. As he passed I looked up at him, and he looked down at me, and our eyes met. There was nothing impudent in his gaze, none of the fervent admiration with which, at a first introduction, the hero in a novel regards the young lady who, at a later period of the story, is to make a great fool of, or be made a great fool by him. It simply expressed the moderate amount of curiosity with which a young Englishman regards a young English-woman whom he sees for the first time. "Are you pretty, I wonder? It's almost impossible to tell by this light." So said those dark, gray eyes, and that was all they said. Why I did it I do not know, and cannot explain to this day, but with my usual stupidity I



blushed crimson; forehead and throat and ears all shared the crimson glow. I became a lobster. Perhaps it was only my guilty imagination, but I fancied I detected a slight smile dawning under a great yellow moustache — a smile which good manners and gentlemanlike feeling strangled in the birth.

However that might be, he made no pause in his walk, but strolled on, and sat down on another tombstone somewhat similar to mine, a few yards further on, where he puffed away solemnly at his pipe, and kept his eyes to himself. I could have scratched my cheeks till they bled, in my righteous anger against them. "So missish!" said I, internally, with much severity. "So school girlish, as if you had never seen a man before!" The ridiculousness of the situation tickled my fancy irresistibly; two people seated, each on their several tombstone, within bow-shot of one another, silent, solemn, and unsociable. I felt that I should disgrace myself by laughing outright if I stayed much longer, and besides the hour was growing late, so I rose from my seat and dawdled towards the gate. As I reached it I heard a deep voice behind me say, "Allow me," and as he spoke, the stranger unlatched the gate, and politely opened it for my benefit. Then he took off his hat, displaying a head of curly yellow hair, and smiled. I was taken by surprise and covered with confusion. "Thank you," I mumbled, ungraciously enough, and made a somewhat gawky inclination, the effect of which was still further marred by the fact that in the very act of making it I trod on my own dress, nearly tripping myself up, and all but measuring my length on the ground in a profounder salaam than I had any intention of executing.



## CHAPTER II.

THOUGH I ran nearly all the way, it was striking ten on the stable clock before I stood under the faint thick clusters of monthly roses that glimmered out of the dark ivy above the heavy, nail-studded, old oak door of my home. We had a big house, but we were not big people — at least not now; we used to be, but we had gone down in the world. People at whom fifty years ago we turned up our noses, now turned up their noses at us. We had come sailing over the sea in beaked ships with Norman William; we had poured out our blood like water, under lion-hearted Richard, for the Holy Sepulchre; we had had fat abbey lands given us by King Henry of the many wives, we had married heiresses, and had gone mounting up to the top of fortune's wheel, and it had been well with us. But alack! in these latter days we had been but too well known at Epsom and Newmarket; we had been very much at home at Crockford's when Crockford's was; we had wasted our young affections and substance on operatic Phrynes; we had run away with our neighbour's wives, and had generally misbehaved ourselves; and, in consequence, our many thousands had dwindled to very few hundreds, and our fair acres passed into the hands of Manchester gents with fat, smug faces, who waged a war of extermination against the letter H, and used big words where little ones would have done better. So the poor old house was very much out of repair, and there was no money wherewith to patch up its stout old walls.

But all this time I am keeping myself waiting at



my own hall-door while detailing my family's genealogy. I stayed a moment to bury my face in a bunch of pale roses, whose scent the night air brought out pure and strong, and then passed into the dim old hall. At this time of night it was as gloomy and ghostly an old place as one would wish to see — very big, very dark, with heavy beams across the low ceiling, oak panels sadly in want of varnish, coats of arms that showed what brilliant marriages we had made in the old times, mangy stags' heads with bulging glass eyes, and rather damaged family portraits. It would have taken a vast expenditure of gas to have lit it up properly, and in lieu of such expenditure one solitary composite candle blinked sleepily from the middle of the large ricketty hall-table, illuminating the Family Bible out of which I read prayers to the servants in an impressive and quasi-clerical manner every morning and evening, and leaving the rest of the apartment "to darkness and to me." As I entered, I was met by a ricketty old man, who, somehow, seemed of a piece with the rest of the establishment, in whose superannuated old body centred the functions of butler, under-butler, groom of the chambers, valet, footman, and page, and whom my father kept on from a motive of compassion, and because he hated changes.

"Tea is ready, Miss," remarked this desirable body servant, emerging from the gloom into the little circle of pale light round the candle.

"Is it?" said I, nothing more original occurring to me to say, as I stroked down my untidy ruddy locks with my fingers.

Without further addition to my toilette, for I feared to keep my father waiting, I ran down two or three



shallow, well-worn stone steps into the dining-room. It was likewise very big and very dark, with more panels that obtrusively proclaimed their destitution of varnish to each casual observer, and with more family pictures glooming down out of black frames, in their faded beauty, for beauty the Le Stranges, man and woman, always had apparently in those old times, however degenerate they might be now. The table in the middle of the room, laid for two people, scanty furnished with light, and scantier still with eatables, showed like an oasis in a desert of obscurity. My father was already in his old velvet arm-chair, and was sitting leaning forward with his head between his hands, in a pose sufficiently expressive. You did not need to see his face to tell you that here was a man careworn and weary, on whom the sun of his life's afternoon was beating scorching hot, a man with whom life was going awry — awry I should think it was; the old house was going down hill, and he did not like it; the brambles had sprung up rankly, and were choking the Lebanonian cedar; he and his were last where they used to be first, and he felt that it would be the death of him. Brave as the Spartan boy, he kept the vitals-gnawing fox hidden under his cloak, away from the eyes of the coldly-prying world — a world often ill-naturedly curious in seeking out and putting its fingers through the tatters in its neighbour's coat — a world

“That would peep and botanize  
Upon its mother's grave.”

I gambolled up to him in a kid-like manner. “Well,” said I cheerfully, “I suppose the tea is quite cold, and you're quite cross, and I'm to have a real



good scolding, aren't I?" Then I stopped and kissed the whitened hairs.

"Eh, what?" said he, thus suddenly called back from his joyless reverie to the contemplation of a young round face that was dear to him, and vainly endeavouring to extricate himself from the meshes of a redundant crop of curly hair, which was being flourished, in its redness, before his face. "Indeed, Nell, I'd forgotten your very existence that minute."

"What could have chased so pleasing an image from your mind's eye?" said I, laughing.

"What always chases every pleasing image," he answered, gloomily.

"Bills, I suppose," returned I discontentedly, "bills, bills, bills! that's the song in this house from morning to night. Is there any word of one syllable in the English language that includes so many revolting ideas!"

"None except hell," said my father, bitterly, "and I sometimes think they're synonymous."

"Dad," said I, "take my advice and try a new plan, don't worry about them any more, take no notice at all of them, we've got the air and the sunshine, and one another left, we ought to be happy, and if the worst comes to the worst, we can but go to gaol, where we shall be nicely dressed, well fed, and have our hair cut, all for nothing."

My ideas of a debtor's prison were evidently not derived from "Pickwick" or "Little Dorrit," inextricably mingled were they with my recollections of the felon's gaol at Nantford our county town.

Papa shook his head, "All very well to say 'don't worry,' Nell; as well say to a criminal on the scaffold



‘don’t be hanged,’ or to a dead body, ‘don’t be buried;’ to be worried or not worried does not depend upon an effort of the will, child.”

I had by this time established myself among the cups and saucers. As he spoke, I held the teapot suspended in mid air, and paused. “Dad,” said I, “doesn’t it say in the Bible, ‘sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’”

“Yes, Nell, and it says too, ‘man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.’ I do not doubt the wisdom or truth of the first, but the last comes home to my inmost soul, ‘as the sparks fly upward!’” He looked up as he spoke, as though tracing the flight of the sparks.

“If you sigh like that,” said I, pettishly, “you’ll blow the candles out, and then there’ll be no sparks to go up.”

My father made no rejoinder, and we both ate in silence for some minutes. But at that period of my life I had no talent whatever *pour le silence*; I would rather have harangued a cod’s head than hold my peace. I began again.

“Dad.”

“Well.”

“Please to listen. I’m going to tell you something; come down from the clouds, or up from the pit, wherever you are.”

“I’m all attention.”

“Well,” said I, narratively, “you must know that I found you so dull and unsociable this evening, that I betook myself to the churchyard!”

“Did you find anybody, I should rather say any of the bodies, particularly sociable there?”



"I rather like dead people's company, pa; they don't contradict one, and one has not to make talk for them, but I saw something besides tombstones to-night. Guess what?"

"A pig?"

"No."

"A widow?"

"No."

"A ghost or two?"

"Fiddlestick!"

"My divining powers are exhausted then," said my father, looking as if he should be rather thankful if I would leave him in peace.

"Guess again."

"Oh, plague take it, how do I know what you saw? one of our servants, perhaps, or some other sight equally strange and invigorating."

"It was not anything of ours, we have not got anything half so good looking about the place, dad, it was a *man*!"

"What sort of a man, old Iken?"

"Well, if it was old Iken, old Iken is six foot high at least, and has got wavy yellow hair, and I have been labouring under a delusion as to his personal appearance for the last nineteen years."

"Young John Barlow, perhaps, come to see whether his mother's tombstone is put up right."

"No such thing, dad. It was no more John Barlow than it was John the Baptist, and that, you'll own, is not probable."

"Some counterjumper from Nantford, probably; they get themselves up much finer than gentlemen now-a-days," said my father, ruefully.



"Papa, don't you suppose I know gold from brass? don't I know a gentleman when I have the luck to see one? *My* man had no ditchwater in his veins, he had a decidedly warlike air too, and you know, dad, you and I have a *penchant* for soldiers; haven't we?"

"I have a *penchant* for peace, my dear, if you would be kind enough to drink your tea, and let me indulge it. Probably this prodigy was one of the Burgoynes, if you are quite sure he was neither Iken Barlow nor a pig."

"No, no; it was not one of the Burgoynes. I know them both. John is crooked, and Charles squints; they are a pair of ugly little boys, and this was a man." My parent smiled benignly at my enthusiasm concerning the beauty of the unknown.

"What's your definition of a man, Nell? John Burgoyne would be surprised to find he did not come under that head. I think in his own estimation he's something very little lower than the angels."

"He may be very little lower than the angels," said I, pouring myself out a second cup, "for I haven't the least idea how high the angels are; but he's a great deal lower than my man — two inches I should think."

"It's a pity we cannot solve the enigma of his name, Nell. 'My man' is rather a vague designation, isn't it?"

I laughed, not quite so musically as usual perhaps, because my voice was partially smothered in buttered toast.

"Yes, dad, and the worst of it is, it isn't true either; he is not mine, and what's more, he is not



ever likely to be either. Oh, dad, I wish we could find out about him. You don't know how pleasant he looked; almost as nice as you when you've got your Sunday coat on."

"That gives an idea of majestic beauty, I own," said my father, with a little gentle sneer at his own stooped shoulders and bowed head.

To my mind it did; in my eyes my father had the amaranthine bloom of ivy-crowned Dionysius. Love looks beyond the withered husk to the fresh kernel, and I knew that to me his heart was always young.

"He was an elderly gentleman, was he?" continued my father. "I begin to think better of him. I fancied at first that he was some foolish young puppy, not come to years of discretion."

"Papa, I like puppies; there's much more life and fun about them than about mumbling old dogs. I don't mean by that that you are a mumbling old dog."

"I did not mean any insult to him, my dear, by calling him a puppy. I'd be a puppy again myself this minute if I could; I'd compound for puppy brains if I could get back puppy spirits with them."

"Are people always happier when they are young than when they are old, pa?"

"Mostly, I think."

"Then I hope I shall die young."

Whereupon I fell a-thinking what an interesting young corpse I should make lying in the big four-poster in the red room, with my emaciated hands folded on my bosom, and a deluge of white flowers about me.



"You'll die, darling, when God pleases," said my father, with his dear old voice shaking a little. "Whether He takes you away from the evil to come, as He did your little mother, or leaves you to fight out the weary fight to the end, as it pleased Him that I should."

Then he rose, and I, running to him, stole my hand into his, and we left the room together in sober fashion.

### CHAPTER III.

THE next day, the 18th of May, 18—, was a day of note in my life. I had been looking forward to it during the past week with a small portion of pleasant anticipation and a large portion of shy tremor. It was the day of my first dinner-party. Yes, though I was nineteen years of age, I had never been at one of those solemn symposiums which form the Englishman's idea of festivity. Only twice or thrice during all my nineteen years had I exhibited my bare neck and arms to an admiring public, and once I had been to a ball. That ball seemed to me the one thing of importance that had ever happened to me. I dated from it as the Greeks did from the first Olympiad, or the Romans, *ab urbe conditâ*.

Dolly — let it be understood that Dolly is my sister, and my senior by four years — had rather got into the habit of repressing me — keeping me and what charms I had in the background, hiding my light, if I had any light, under a bushel. As for herself, she loved the world, technically so called, with all



her heart, and soul, and strength, with the one-ideal devotion of a Frenchwoman.

In the main, I was tolerably content to remain under the bushel where I had been deposited by sisterly care; having hardly tasted the fire-water of dissipation, I did not miss its stimulus. I stayed at home with my old daddy, and pottered about our pleasant, weedy old garden, cawed around by clamorous rooks, and where Jacob's ladder, and columbines, and white pinks, and lilies of all sorts and sizes flourished with a luxuriance I have never seen approached in trimmer parterres. O dear old dad! when shall I walk hand in hand with you again? Will you call me your little Nell in Heaven? I do not want you to be a glorified saint, with an aureole round your head, and triumphant joy in your altered eyes; no longer full of that careworn, tender look. I thirst to see you just as you were, in the old hall garden, just as you were with your dear gray head, and your shabby old coat, and your poor sorrowful smile. I should not recognize you, exultant in your palmy crown, I who only knew you toiling along under your heavy cross.

Let me try and forget you, oh, my father; do without you, as one after another we have to do without our darlings here below. Let me go back to the old Castle Rackrent, where I lived when I was not all alone. Lazy and dowdy I pottered about there, with my inconveniently abundant hair fastened up, in an unbecoming lump, at the back of my head, and my slim young body encased in such of Dolly's old clothes as I could induce to meet across me. Sometimes, indeed, it struck me that it would be pleasant to flaunt about in airy fashionable raiment, such as my sister



rejoiced in, instead of in my sorry gowns, which made my figure look as if it went out wherever it ought to go in, and went in wherever it ought to go out. Once for a few days, I cherished the wild scheme of launching forth my small boat on the ocean of the world outside the old black and white house, with the casemented windows, and the queer gargoyle faces grinning down on us poor players strutting out our little day beneath them. I even let my fancy stray amongst troops of unknown, ardent youths, all of whom bore a resemblance more or less *prononcé* to a certain penniless Captain Gordon, with whom, at the before-mentioned ball, I had danced eight several times, thereby drawing down the vials of Dolly's wrath on my devoted head.

Once, and once only, I rebelled against my enforced hermitship, and we had a grand quarrel upon the subject. But Dolly being strong-minded, and I being weak-minded, I being the earthenware vessel, and she the iron one, the dispute ended, as our disputes always did, by my *fondant en larmes*, begging Dolly's pardon, and submitting.

"After all," said I to myself, leaning out of the window among the honeysuckle sprays, to cool my tear-swollen cheeks, "it is as it should be." Dolly was beautiful, and the Le Stranges had always been beautiful, and it was right she should go forth and be a credit to the old house, and I was ugly, and the Le Stranges had never been ugly, and it was meet that I should keep in the obscurity for which alone I was calculated. But was I ugly? It was not very often that I asked myself whether the face that met me night and morning in my looking-glass was one calculated to make men's hearts ache, and their hot blood surge, or



to lull them in a stagnant calm; but now and again the question would suggest itself, and clamour to be answered. Was I ugly? Hesitatingly, slowly, sadly, regretfully, I always answered in the affirmative. Sometimes I feared I was distressingly ugly. There was nothing neat, or smooth, or regular about my face, and oh those carrotty locks! How many sighs and inward groans they cost me.

One day I resolved to ask Dolly's opinion about my outward woman. Dolly was not a very nice person I thought, not very easy to live with, and though she was my only sister, I did not care much about her; but for her judgment I had the profoundest reverence. We were sitting in the hall that winter morning. Dolly on a dark oak settle with a carved and writhen back, by the wide fireplace, in which a great log of wood was crackling and sputtering cheerily, and against the faded Utrecht velvet, Dolly's bright blue draperies, and pure young profile, stood out clear and bright. I, who have a propensity for sitting on things that were not intended to be sat on, and for not sitting on things that were so intended, was squatting in an ungraceful but agreeable attitude, on the middle of a long table, that ran along under the windows over against her, hugging my own knees.

Dolly was a very fair woman to look upon; a small oval face, liquid brown eyes that had a way of looking up meekly and beseechingly, that no man less self-contained than St. Senanus could resist, a little sharp-cut nose absolutely perfect, a sweet grave mouth, and an expression nun-like, dove-like, Madonna-like; she looked as if her life must be one long prayer. I do not think it was though, or if it was it was a prayer



said backwards. I gazed at her with youthful enthusiasm, dashed with envy.

"Dolly," said I, "I wish I were as pretty as you."

"Do you?" said Dolly, not looking up from her work, for what was the good of looking meekly, beseechingly at me?

"Yes, I do," said I, "I'd pray for such a face every night among my other prayers, only I know it would be no good."

"Not the slightest, I should say."

"I wonder why God gives some people so many more gifts than others; will he make it up to the poor ugly ones in Heaven?"

"You'd better consult Mr. Bowles."

Now Mr. Bowles was our curate, and an individual for whom I entertained one of those unreasoning, unjustifiable abhorrences, often bred in the immature minds of the extremely young of the female sex, for some one of their acquaintance.

"Dolly," said I, reproachfully, "that's always the way you answer my questions. I'm sure I wonder that I ever ask you any."

"Don't, then."

"By-the-by, Dolly," getting rather hot, and clutching my knees more firmly than ever, "do you think I am — ahem — ahem — so *very* ugly?"

"I never think about it," responded Dolly, coolly.

"But do think about it, this once, Dolly, please," I urged anxiously.

Dolly raised her sweet eyes, and surveyed my perturbed countenance calmly.

"I don't admire you," she said, dropping them



again, "but that's no reason why somebody should not. Some people may like red hair and a wide mouth."

I yielded to destiny. I *was* ugly. I must try and be good, or clever, or eccentric, for it was very evident that pretty I could never be. I was ashamed of myself for having mooted the question. At the time I am writing of, Dolly was away from home on a visit to some admiring friends in a distant county, and to this fact was owing my introduction to the world. Her absence was a matter of great, though secret rejoicing, both to my father and myself. We did not tell one another we were glad, but I think we were each tolerably well aware of the other's sentiments. Truth to tell, our Madonna kept us rather in order, and was somewhat of a thorn in the flesh to us. I sometimes caught myself wondering whether, in the event of Dolly's death, I should be enabled to cry a little and wear a decent semblance of grief. I hoped I should be, but misdoubted myself somewhat. I need not have been disquieted. As I write, myself tottering on the verge of that last bed I so tiredly long for, Dolly is in the heyday of health and prosperity. Dolly will have that tear difficulty to contend with in my case; not I in hers. She will vanquish it, and will weep plentifully over this poor thin carcass, which indeed is ugly now.



## CHAPTER IV.

AT about half-past six on the evening of that ever memorable day when I crossed the narrow brook between "womanhood and childhood fleet," my father's voice came sounding up the crooked oak staircase to my virgin chamber. "Nell, Nell, the carriage is waiting!" I was standing dressed, with all my worldly goods scattered higgledy-piggledy about me, making derisive faces at my own image in the glass, and wondering to myself whether any one in England was the owner of such obnoxious locks as mine; wondering likewise, whether it would be wrong to smash the mirror which told me such disagreeable truths.

"I'm coming, pa," responded I, still making passes at the pale, rose-filleted head I saw there. Ugh, you fright! There's pa calling again. Where are my gloves? Oh, Heavens, where can they have gone to? Yes, pa, this very minute! What a potato face! It can't be helped. *I must go.*" Thus ejaculating, I darted down stairs. My father looked at me as I stood before him with an expression more doubtful than admiring.

"I don't know much about such things, Nell," he began, dubiously; "but is not your gown rather — what d'ye call it? I do not know how to express myself; is not it rather scant and shabby?"

"It *is* rather skimping, I'm afraid, pa, and I *did* let down two inches, and put in a new breadth too, but tarletane is *so* dear now-a-days."

A look of mortified vexation clouded his kind old face as I spoke.

"I wish I'd known this before," he began; but I interrupted him.



"Please do not trouble about it," I said, hastily; "ten to one not a soul will know what I have on, or whether I have anything on at all!"

The cloud did not disperse; it deepened.

"I like you to look as well as other people. I don't want people to say that I'm too poor to dress my girls properly."

"They won't say anything of the kind, dad, unless they are disagreeable, purseproud snobs, and if they do say it we shan't hear them!"

"I don't want my little girl to be cut out by those fine Miss Coxes," persisted my father, thinking bitterly of the days when the said Miss Coxes' sire would have been glad to clean his boots for him.

I laughed. "Papa," said I, "if I were dressed in sackcloth and ashes, or in the brim of a hat and spurs, I should look more like a lady than those great bouncing, overdressed dairymaids, and after all, that's all that matters much."

A three miles' drive through the soft spring evening, along a turnpike road, with close-cropped hedges on either side, whence the shears had lopped off all the pretty hawthorn flowers, leaving only dusty leaves; then we drew up before a Grecian portico, on which the arms of the Coxes — arrived last month from the Heralds' College — were blazoned in full-blown glory, while a nondescript antique bird, half cock, half griffin, and supposed to be the Coxe crest, showed its ugly stone-beak and claws all over the house in every nook and angle where antique bird could perch. Big footmen, all calves and crimson plush, on whose heads the dredging-box had done its work, a blaze of light and Babel of voices, and then I, not knowing exactly whe-



ther I was on my head or my heels, found myself being presented by my father to a large woman, whose roseate arms were fettered with heavy gold bracelets, fresh from the jeweller's, and above whose pug face a tiara rose like a mural crown.

Having got through the ceremony of introduction, I subsided into a chair, and gradually gained courage to look about me. A lofty, spacious saloon, oh, how unlike ours at home; wax-lit chandeliers, Cupids and Psyches sprawling on the ceiling; Carlo Dolcean Madonnas smiling insipidly, and Claudean landscapes flashing sunnily from the walls, a general impression of gilding and ormolu and white paint. There was a very large party of substantial country gentlemen, lords and commoners, with bald pates and a prosperous stall-fed air, not unlike their own oxen; matrons with double chins, in the folds and creases of whose fat necks diamonds blazed fitfully; youths for whom Poole had done his utmost; and girls like a flock of full-plumaged doves. Oh, those young ladies! I could bear the gorgeous dowagers; I could bear the irreproachable cornets, and baronets, and undergraduates, but the girls were too much for my equanimity. If my poor frock had looked scant and skimping in the hall at home, where it had the background of oak chairs and panels to set it off, what aspect must it have worn here, among the crisp *chefs-d'œuvre* of Mmes. Descou and Elise? It *was* ashamed of itself, I think, for it clung to me, limp and flabby, like a wet bathing-dress; and to complete my discomfiture, I discovered that my hair was dressed in a fashion that had died the death at least a year and a half ago.

I was as much a stranger in this my own neigh-



bourhood as a native of Kamtschatka could have been, and knew not a soul. Several people (men especially) looked at me, and I attributed their notice solely to my outlandish attire.

"They are wondering who that bundle of rags, that scarecrow, is!" said I, bitterly, to myself. "Oh, Nelly Lestrangle, you poor dowdy, how I wish you were back in your old holland gown, eating cold mutton for tea, in the dining-room at home!"

I was very childish for my age, and I felt very lonely — so lonely that the tears came into my eyes as I sat contemplating my hands lying in their wrinkled eighteen-penny gloves upon my lap. Just as dinner was announced, a gentleman entered the room — a gentleman, the adornment of whose person had apparently detained him somewhat long. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with yellow hair — a man whom the armour of some strong King Olaf, some red-handed Jarl, would not have misbecome. I recognized him in a moment; he was the hero of my churchyard adventure. My father, who was just in the act of conducting old Lady Blank to the festive board, looked over his shoulder, and smiled at me. I smiled too; and a minute afterwards I had quite forgot my limp one-skirted frock and ill-dressed hair. All my annoyances were merged in shy pleasure when I found that my Viking was under orders to take me in to dinner. But when he had so taken me, and had deposited me on a gorgeous velvet chair beside him, he did not seem in any violent hurry to cultivate my acquaintance. He ate his soup deliberately, and left me to the contemplation of his outward man. Perhaps he knew that he was pleasant to look upon, and trusted to that pleasant-



ness to prepossess a stranger in his favour; perhaps he did not care whether I were prepossessed or not. I was sroupless; so I amused myself glancing obliquely at my neighbour. Very curly Saxon hair — so curly as to excite in envious, lank-haired brother officers a suspicion (a base and unfounded suspicion) of the agency of tongs; a beautiful bronzed face, with the scar of a sabre-cut running down the cheek, close to the ear; a beardless, whiskerless face; hairless, save for the heavy tawny moustache.

"I wish he'd speak," said I to myself at last. "Perhaps he has nothing to say; good-looking men seldom have the gift of tongues, Dolly says." I would as soon have thought of cutting off my head as of originating a conversation with a perfect stranger, so I held my peace, and wondered how he had acquired that scar. At last, as if he had read my thoughts, he turned towards me.

"I'm afraid I startled you rather, last night?" said he, with a smile.

"Not much," responded I, briefly, turning my head half away, after the manner of shy girls.

"Did you think I was an evil spirit or a bogy, going about, seeking whom I might devour?" he asked, more familiarly. I suppose he saw I was young and a raw recruit in the ranks of the *beau monde*, and consequently that he might treat me as *sich*.

"No, I didn't," said I, "because —;" and there I stopped. I was going to say "because you are too good-looking for a bogy," but I recollected in time that it is an inversion of the order of society for a young lady to pay broad compliments to an unknown gentleman.



"Because what?" asked he.

"Because — because —," said I, floundering about, and seizing desperately the first reason that occurred to me, silly as that reason happened to be, "because I never heard of a boggy with yellow hair!"

"My hair is not yellow," responded he, carelessly; "nothing half so nice; sandy decidedly."

"It is not my idea of sandy," I maintained stoutly.

"What is your idea of sandy, then, may I ask?"

"Mrs. Coxe's is sandy," said I, with youthful rashness, looking towards the lady of the house, "and very hideous it is."

"I am sorry you think her so hideous," responded he, coolly; "she's my sister!"

I was covered with confusion. I would fain have slipped from my chair underneath the table, and spent the remainder of the dinner-hour among the feet of the company. I reddened to the roots of my hair, which, as I have before mentioned, was red too. My shamefaced eyes sought my plate, and studied the parrot-poppy depicted thereon in glowing colours. I attempted no apology, but sat dumb-founded. Then a deep voice, stifling much laughter, sounded close to my blazing ear.

"Never mind! I won't tell of you. By-the-by, Mrs. Coxe is not my sister, and I only said so to frighten you."

I felt extremely angry, though profoundly relieved.

"How could you tell such a story?" I asked, reproachfully.

"It was not a story, as you call it," he answered, with an almost imperceptible mimicking of my in-



dignant intonation. "In one sense, she *is* my sister. We are all brethren, aren't we? — at least, we call each other dearly beloved brethren in the prayer-book every Sunday."

"That is very flippant," said I gravely; I had a great respect for the prayer-book, and did not like to hear it mentioned so lightly. I fancied he looked slightly surprised that a country chit like me should venture to rebuke a man of the world like him, but he said nothing to that effect, and rather abruptly changed the subject.

"Is it one of the manners and customs of the young ladies in these parts to sit among the tombs towards nightfall?" he inquired.

"I don't know about other young ladies; *I* sit there sometimes."

"You are a strong-minded person, evidently; cart-ropes would not drag one of my sisters within half a mile of a churchyard after dark."

"Indeed! How many sisters have you got? —

'Sisters and brothers, little maid,  
How many may you be?' eh?

"'Sisters and brothers, little *man*,' it ought to be in this case; oughtn't it? Well, I've got two."

"Are they like you?"

"Not a bit; much better looking."

I felt incredulous, but I hope I kept my incredulity out of my countenance.

"Have you been here long?" I resumed, catechetically.

"Since last Tuesday,"

"Are you going to stay here long?"



"That depends upon how I like my quarters. Is there anything more you wish to know?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I'm sorry I asked so many questions," I said contritely, fearing I had committed a grievous sin against good manners. "I did not intend to be rude, indeed?"

"Rude," said he, "nonsense! I should not think such a pretty mouth could say anything rude, if it tried."

It was rather impudent of him, certainly, and I ought to have told him so, I suppose; but, as he spoke, the dark gray eyes looked full into mine, with an expression I had never seen in mortal eyes before; an expression that sealed my lips, and sent a sort of odd shiver — a shiver that had nothing to say to cold, through my frame. I felt that, to the utter neglect of "*beignets aux huitres*" (than which no dish can be more delectable), he was watching me, which did not add to my composure.

"Don't be angry with me," he said at last, in a tone that meant to be penitent, bending his handsome head down towards my downcast face. "I didn't mean to say it — it slipped out."

"I'm not angry," I said, with some difficulty; "that is, not very; but I'm afraid — you — think — I'm an ignorant country bumpkin, to whom you may say anything you like?"

"Upon my soul, I don't," he replied, earnestly. "I think — well! it doesn't matter much what I think about you."

"You cannot think much about me," said I, "seeing that you have only known me for about a quarter of an hour."



"It doesn't take long to know some people!"

"They're so shallow, you mean?" suggested I, attempting to be arch.

"What a shame!" he said, "you know I didn't mean that; but have you never heard of a sort of inexplicable sympathy and attraction between two people at first sight?"

I had heard of something else at first sight, but I did not say so.

"I have nobody to sympathize with or be attracted to, at home, except papa, and our old man-servant, and the sexton."

"What do you mean? do you never go out anywhere?"

"Never. Dolly does often, but I don't."

"Who is Dolly?" he asked, rather amused at my *naïveté*, "or I suppose I ought to say who's *Miss* or *Mrs.* Dolly?"

"Dolly is my sister."

"Oh! older or younger?"

"Four years older; she was twenty-three last January, and I am nineteen this month."

"You are very candid."

"Am I? why should not I be?"

"No reason whatever; and do you and Dolly — I beg her pardon, *Miss* Dolly, live together, all alone?"

"All alone! oh dear no; we live with papa, of course; that is papa opposite."

How many more revelations concerning my family history I might have made in my young ingenuousness can never now be ascertained, for at this point I perceived Mrs. Coxe inclining her head towards the old woman of exaltedest rank at the other end of the



table; whereupon we all sailed and floated and shuffled out of the room. How glad I should have been to have stayed with the gentlemen; protected by papa, and condescendingly chatted to by my blonde King Olaf! With my return to the drawing-room, returned my sense of loneliness, my consciousness of shabby clothes, and my embarrassment as to the disposal of my hands. There was no wish, I am sure, among those dames and damsels to neglect or be unkind to the poor gawky young stranger; it was only the force of circumstances. One good-natured, graceful Lady Alice tried her best to extract my ideas on the comparative charms of Brighton and Scarborough; but finding I had no ideas on the subject to be extracted, she desisted in despair.

All the other ladies knew each other very well, lived in the same circle, had the same pursuits, objects, interests. I, alone, shivered chilly outside the magic ring. I was like a ghost come back after the lapse of a century, to the house where he used to be lord and master and darling, who hears a language that he understands not. What did I know about the Duchess of A's at home? or dear Lady B's ball? I who had never to my knowledge set eyes upon a duchess, and whose sole experience of balls was derived from the inglorious Infirmary Ball of our little county town. However, I looked with unshaken faith to the coming of the gentlemen for bettering my condition, and better it that coming certainly did. If I had expected indeed that my large new friend would make any demonstration in my favour, I was disappointed. He betook himself straightway to the piano, where a brilliant little brunette was trilling airy French songs in a voice like a bird's;



there he stood with his back against the wall, now and then leaning forward to whisper two or three words into the pretty musician's ear, words that made the dark eyes sparkle more brightly than before.

I felt an insane desire to sing too; I *could* sing; it was the one accomplishment I possessed, but nobody requested the pleasure of hearing me warble; so I sat chafing, with my talent hid in a napkin. Then a quartett of old fogies sat down to whist, and cut, and dealt, and shuffled, and abused their cards, and quarrelled with their partners, as irascible old gentlemen will; and other bald heads got into groups, and bragged about their shorthorns to their hearts' content. And gradually the younger men sought out such women as seemed good in their eyes, and sat into their pockets, to the satisfaction of both parties; even dowdy I found favour in somebody's eyes.

Two or three men came and were introduced to me, and I attributed their notice to a praiseworthy feeling of compassion, having too unaffected a belief in my own ugliness to attribute it to any other motive. I tired my neck somewhat craning up at them as they stood black-legged around me, and they were very civil — one of them indeed, a jolly-looking, short, dark man, considerably past his *première jeunesse*, whom I had heard addressed as Sir Hugh, civiller far, as I now see, than the occasion required. While we were making our *adieux* to the hostess on our departure, King Olaf left his Brunette and her little songs in praise of love and wine rather abruptly, and gave me his arm to lead me to the carriage. We were in the hall alone together for a minute, and as he put my shawl round my shoulders he stooped and gazed full into my eyes.



Innocent and childish as I was, I could not mistake that expression, bewildering me with its bold, avowed admiration.

"Will there be any use in my going to the churchyard to-morrow evening?" he asked hurriedly.

"I'm sure I don't know," said I, turning away coldly, "it's nothing to me whether you go there or not."

"Is it not? I'm sorry for that," he said gravely; and I was sorry too, as soon as the words were out of my mouth.

And then my father called me, and I ran hastily away, and left him standing under the portico, with the carriage lamps gilding his severe Greek beauty.

## CHAPTER V.

"THE Federals have had another licking, Nell," said my father, in an exultant tone next morning, as I entered the dining-room, in my usual elegant morning *négligé* (and very *négligé* it was), and with my hands full of dear old-fashioned flowers, dark claret-coloured double gilly-flowers, great heavy heads of lilac, and bottles of colour.

"Have they?" said I; "Brutes! I'm so glad."

We were great politicians, my father and I, and I could have stood a very stiff examination in the battles of the American war. If I had been left to myself I do not think I should have cared very much whether the Confederates conjugated the active or passive voice of the verb "*to whip*." I should have listened with equal indifference to the "tall doin's" of Abolitionists



or Secessionists; but I was truly thankful for any subject of public interest which could rouse my father from his melancholy, and moreover I loved him so entirely that what interested him, interested me too, of necessity. There is no relationship so delightful as that between father and daughter when at its best. Some thought of this kind ran through my head as I sat eating my porridge, and occasionally glancing at my father, whose dear old head was half buried between two sheets of the *Times*. It prompted me to say:

"Papa, I sometimes feel inclined to wish that Dolly would never come back, that she would live always with those Graftons, who seem to appreciate her so much more than you and I do."

"You should not say that, Nell," said my father from the banks of the Potomac; but his rebuke was of the very mildest description.

"Why should not I say so, if I feel it? — you and I are so happy together, aren't we, daddy?"

"Yes, very happy," answered my father; but even as he spoke he sighed.

Sighs are the gales that blow us to heaven, I sometimes think; they breathe unconscious weariness of the "here," and longing for the "there."

"I should like," pursued I, "things always to be just as they are now; you and I living here together, for ever and ever and ever, with our pigs and our chickens and our cabbages, only we'd have no money matters, and nobody to trouble us."

"Your wants are nearly as few as Diogenes', Nell; indeed you haven't included a tub in your list of indispensables."

"You're my only indispensable, dad!"



"Poor little lass! you'll think differently some day when you've got a husband and children, and I'm dead and gone."

"When you're dead and gone," said I decisively, "I shall be dead and gone too, for I could not bear to live without you;" and I really believed it.

"Nonsense! child," said my father, smiling. "Did you ever see a stone thrown into the pond? there's a great splash, and a few circles on the water, and that's about all, isn't it? Well, when I die there'll be a great splash of tears and hullabalooing, and a few circles of tender recollections, and then the surface will smooth itself over and it'll be all right again."

"I was so overcome by this affecting metaphor, that a piece of porridge stuck in my weasand and all but choked me.

"Like the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day," said my father over to himself, reflectively, leaning his head on his hand, "that's about our tether, Nell; wet pocket-handkerchiefs, and long faces for a day, and then somebody new springs up, and fills up our vacant hole in this odd ant-hill, and we're jostled away into the limbo where so many better and wiser have been bundled before us."

I am soft-hearted — easily moved to tears. I was blubbering gently behind the tea-kettle now.

"Crying, Nell!" says my father, roused from his reverie by my sniffs. "Come, child, I'm not dead yet; wait till my coffin is ordered, before you set to making lamentations over me."

"You're ve-ve-ry d-d-is-agreeable," said I, with moist indignation, "I've a great mind never to say anything to you again. You're always bothering about



dying. I wish to heaven there was not such a word in the dictionary."

"If there was not, it would be a very terrible world, Nell," replied my father, gravely; "every man with Cain's curse upon his brow."

"Do let us talk of something else," cried I, peevishly. "I hate such moping sort of subjects."

"By all means; something gay and festive. The party last night, for instance," said the author of my being, ironically.

"It was not so bad as I expected," returned I, brightening up, and eradicating the moisture from my eyes with my knuckles.

"How did you get on with all those fine ladies?" inquired my father, kindly.

"Middling," said I, "I did not care much about them; I liked the men better. If I went into society, I should like to go to parties where there were no women, only men."

"That is a sentiment that I think I should keep for home use, my dear, if I were you."

"Should you? Well, perhaps so; but women are so prying and censorious. All the time you are talking to them you feel sure that they are criticising the sit of your tucker, and calculating how much a yard your dress cost. Now, if you're only pretty and pleasant, — indeed, even if you're not either (I mentally classed myself under this latter head), — men are good-natured and take you as they find you, and make the best of you."

My father did not dispute my position.

"Talking of men," said he, "that Sir Hugh Lancaster seems to be a very nice young fellow; he and I had a great deal of talk together."



"Do you mean that little black man you introduced to me?" inquired I, contemptuously. "Young fellow, indeed! Well, if he's a young fellow, Methuselah was rather juvenile than otherwise."

My father sipped his coffee reflectively.

"Poor Methuselah," said he, "nine hundred and sixty-six years he had of it, hadn't he? How sick he must have been of the eternal millround — seed-time and harvest, summer and winter coming back near a thousand times, to find him hanging on still!"

I had nothing to suggest on the subject of the patriarch, so I held my peace.

"Did he do nothing worth recording all those ten centuries?" went on my father musingly, "that we're told of him only that he was born, and begat sons and daughters, and died."

"You've wandered some way from Sir What's-his-name, pa," said I, recalling my parent's spirit from the realms of barren speculations whither it had travelled.

"I'll come back to him, my dear, if you wish; only I don't think I know much more about him than I do about his prototype, Methuselah!"

"And to my thinking, he's hardly more interesting," added I, with which scant courtesy I dismissed the worthy baronet from my conversation and my thoughts.

I had often heard other motherless girls deploring their destitute condition; envying such of their friends as were in the enjoyment of a mother's care and supervision; but such sentiments, such regrets met no echo in my heart — but rather inspired me with strongest surprise and amazement. It was to me a matter of



unfeigned and heartfelt gratulation that my mother had died in my infancy. As often as I came in contact with well-drilled daughters, nestling under the wing of a portly mamma, I hugged myself on my freedom: my father was more to me than ten mothers. If my mother had lived, thought I, I should have been only second in his affections, some one else would have been nearer his heart than I — an idea almost too bitter to be contemplated. If I had had a mother, I should have had to mend my gloves, and keep my hair tidy, and practise on the piano, and be initiated into the mysteries of stitching. My mother had been among the fortunate of the earth, having died while yet young and fair, and passionately loved, before the world had grown tired of her, or she of it. In the early morning of her life, ere the glow of prime had faded,

“The Almighty’s breath spake out in death,  
And God did draw Honora up  
The golden stairs to Heaven.”

Her name, I may mention incidentally, was not Honora, but it would spoil a very lovely line to introduce her real cognomen of Dorothy into it, so I have ceded to the necessity which makes Anthony White appear for ever as Anthony Blue on his tombstone.

Devoted as I was to my father, I could not always be with him; sometimes he preferred his own society and that of his books to mine, found more solace for his vexations in epigrammatic French essayists and German metaphysicians, whose rhapsodies about the beautiful and the sublime I could make neither head nor tail of, to my girlish cackle. Sometimes, but more rarely, he took long solitary rides about his



heavily mortgaged farms on a sedate old cob, with a docked tail and hogged mane, who, like his master, had seen better days. The soft May wind, and the invitations of the garrulous blackbirds and thrushes, had tempted him to set forth on such a ride one evening after tea, two days after my introduction to society. Consequently I was thrown on my own resources, and rather short of a job I was.

If I had followed my inclination, I should have betaken myself to the churchyard, to see whether my stranger might not be there again, as he had hinted (not dimly) that he might be, but two considerations checked me. If, on the one hand, he were to be there, I could not look him in the face for shame, and if, on the other hand, he were not — if I were to go to meet him, and he were not to be met — if I were to seek him, and he were not to be found, what words could express my degradation? Even if there had been no new charm about the fair old graveyard sloping westwards, the old one would have been quite strong enough to draw my heart and myself thither. I liked to go there in the soundless gloaming, and think of all sorts of grave dark things. When one is very young and very happy, one courts melancholy thoughts for the sake of the contrast they afford to one's own inner life; in later days, such thoughts are less coy, need no courting, but run to meet us, embrace, and cling about us, even when we could well dispense with the pleasure of their society. But in youth, when the blood is rioting through the veins, life seems so strong within us as to be almost able to challenge the old scythesman to single combat, and to worst him. At nineteen, death seems so immeasurably distant,



we may have so many miles of pleasant pasture-land and shady woodland to traverse before we dip our feet in the inky stream, into which whosoever steppeth straightway

“He forgets the days before.”

I was fond of sitting among those mossy headstones, speculating on the for-ever-ended histories of those dead people — those uneducated churls, who had been so below me in intelligence while alive, now so immeasurably above me in the knowledge that there is but one way of attaining to; fond, too, was I of marvelling after what various fashions they had battled through their lives; with what different degrees of apathy, despair, and heaven-born faith they had confronted him whom some call foe, some friend. But the churchyard, and its attendant reveries being out of the question, I had to cast about for other occupation — occupation of a more practical kind. Our garden, as I have said, was a very wilderness. Chickweed and groundsel, and other abominations, intruded their plebeian heads among my crown imperials and sweet nancies, — even tried to choke the nemophilas that were just opening their azure eyes, mirroring the sky. I stooped to dislodge a thistle which had impertinently insinuated itself into a bunch of sweet-williams.

“I may as well garden a bit,” I said to myself: “it will pass the time, and oh! how slow it is going now, even though I did put on all the clocks half an hour.” So I fetched a pair of gardening gloves and a little mat, knelt down on the latter, and set to digging, and raking, and weeding with a will. It is



pleasant to feel one's self useful, and doing some good in one's generation, and I, being ordinarily anything but a busy bee, found that to be laudably industrious was a new and delightful sensation. And as I grubbed, and watered, and scuffled, I ran over in my mind all the little incidents of my late dissipation, composed smart answers and brilliant repartees, which I might have made and had not at various points of my conversation with the gray-eyed stranger, and wondered, for the twentieth time, what he could have meant by staring at me as he had done under the gaslight in the hall. "Could he have thought me pretty?" I asked myself at last, being unable to find any other explanation for that long eager gaze, the remembrance of which still stirred my silly little soul in the newest, queerest, joyfullest fashion.

At this preposterous suggestion I raised myself from my stooping attitude, dropped my trowel, and pushed back the flapping wide-leaved hat from my hot forehead. "Impossible!" said I. "Pretty, indeed! after what Dolly said, and Dolly's a good judge, ill-natured as she is! Nothing more unlikely. Certainly, living such a secluded life makes one magnify trifles, make mountains of molehills. I'm afraid, my good girl, that you are a sad fool!" These last words I spoke aloud, little thinking that I had any other auditors than the columbines and the damask roses which I had been tying up. Judge then of my surprise when my self-complimenting remark found itself answered. Somebody close at my elbow said, "Are you? I should not have thought it." I started as if a bullet had hit me, sprang to my feet, and confronted the object of my conjectures. There he stood, tall and



straight, and strong as a young oak, on the gravel walk, between the prim box edgings, smiling broadly at my discomfiture.

"I'm sorry you have such a poor opinion of yourself," he continued, maliciously enjoying my confusion.

I made no answer to this remark, but struggled violently to compose myself, and to recollect how much I had said aloud; whether only the last clause of my sentence, which was comparatively harmless, or enough to have disgraced me for ever.

"Won't you ask me how I am? Won't you shake hands with me this evening, Miss Lestranger?" inquired my tormentor, resuming his gravity.

"I'm afraid I cannot," responded I, laughing constrainedly, holding up my hands in their earthly coverings to show him.

"I have no objection whatever to a little dirt; it's rather wholesome than otherwise, and I have tender reminiscences of the dirt pies of my youth."

I drew off my gauntlet with precipitation, and laid my hand (a long slim member) in his.

"It was rather cool of me, coming in here without anybody inviting me?" he asked, detaining my not unwilling, though rather embarrassed fingers, holding them as if he had forgotten all about them, and looking down (for though I was rather a tall girl, beside him I was small and short enough) at me.

"Oh no!" said I, "it did not matter at all, only you startled me rather."

"Did I? I'm so sorry; but you see I was just toddling about that field over there, in the most pitiable state, when I caught sight of some one (I felt sure it



was you) burrowing in the ground, and I could not resist the temptation of coming to speak to you; a friendly human shape is a sight not to be despised in this desolate country. I could not throw away such a chance."

"Could you not?"

"Could you not?" said he, repeating my words rather reproachfully. "So that's all you've got to say to me? Why are you so hard, and cold, and stiff?"

"I don't mean to be," said I, naïvely, and I did not.

At this juncture my hat fell off the back of my head, and he had to release my hand to pick it up. Having restored my head-piece, he resumed —

"Why were you so cross the other night?"

"I was not cross."

"Yes, you were; very cross. I never saw any one more cross. I could not conceive how I had vexed you; I asked myself a dozen times after you were gone, what can I have said to make that young lady so angry with me; only I'm afraid I did not say *that young lady*."

"What did you say?" asked I, with female inquisitiveness.

"Never mind what I said. I did not call you by your name, for I did not know what it was, nor don't now; would you mind telling me what it is?"

"Nell."

"Nell! Nell! I like it; but were you christened *Nell*?"

"No-o-o," said I, dubiously. "I suppose not; I suppose I was christened Ellinor, but nobody but the servants ever call me so. What's your name?"



"Richard."

"Richard what?"

"Richard Harold."

"Richard Harold what?"

"Oh! you mean what's my surname? M'Gregor. I thought you knew that."

"No, I did not," said I.

Pretty names, I remarked to myself; but I like *Olaf* better; it's much more descriptive. I knelt down on my mat, and prepared to resume my gardening. But Richard Harold M'Gregor remonstrated.

"Please don't do any more of that horrid rooting and scraping," said he, seizing my trowel, and holding it high out of my reach; "you have made yourself quite hot already. Do come and sit down on that stone bench, and talk a bit; have pity on a poor fellow who is dying for some one to exchange ideas with."

"I have nothing to say," responded I, but I complied with his request without any demur, and sat down on the old bench with the little green mosses and lichens in the crevices of the cracked stone, while he stretched his lazy length at my feet.

"And so you spend your life in this rum old garden, do you?" inquired he, looking round, and taking a comprehensive survey of our roses and cabbages and gooseberry bushes, all growing in friendly proximity.

"Yes," said I, "here, and in the house, and among the chickens."

"Rather dreary work, isn't it?" asked he, thinking, I fancy, what a contrast his own existence was to mine.



"I don't find it so," said I.

"In fact, you like it better than any other kind of life, I suppose."

"I never tried any other, so I cannot tell," responded I, sagely. "I should not like any life away from papa."

"You're very fond of him then?" he asked, and I fancied I heard him mutter something like "lucky old beggar," under his breath.

"I should think so," replied I, emphatically.

"You cannot fancy ever being fonder of any one else, I suppose?" he inquired, pulling a blade of grass, and biting it.

"No-o-o, I think not," I answered cautiously.

"I wish *I* had anybody to love me like that," said he, looking wistfully up in my face.

Of course he meant some sister, or mother, or friend, and of course I took it so; but innocent as my heart was, my detestable cheeks thought it necessary to hang out their ever ready flame-signals again, giving me completely the air of having misunderstood his meaning, and being in the expectation of hearing him in his next sentence request the gift of my valuable affections. He was charitable; looked away, and ate more grass. Having given my cheeks time to cool, he looked round again.

"I think you and I should get on together," said he; "don't you?"

I nodded my head. "I think so," I said, nibbling a daisy stalk.

"Shall we make a solemn league and covenant? shall we settle to be friends henceforth and for ever?" he asked.



I was rather taken aback by such suddenness of action.

"I don't know about that," I said, hesitatingly; "it would be rather awkward if, after having taken me for your friend, you found I was not so nice as you thought me."

I took it for granted, in my innocence, that he *did* think me nice. He laughed.

"Not so nice as I thought — eh?" said he. "Well, I don't think I mind running the risk if you'll do as much for me. Life is too short to waste in preliminaries."

"It *is* short," said I, sententiously.

"Horribly short!" replied he, with a sigh; "and if I like you and you like me, as I hope you do. *Do* you, by-the-by?"

He raised himself on his elbow till his face was on a level with my knee, and awaited my answer.

"Yes, I do," I said, slowly; "what I know of you, at least — that is not much."

"Give me your hand, then, to seal our contract."

I felt rather flustered by the rapid strides our acquaintance had made within the last ten minutes; but I gave him my hand, and as I did so, my father, my adored papa, appeared round the corner. As he caught sight of the pretty *tableau vivant* we had kindly got up in his garden to surprise him, he looked extremely astonished and considerably displeased. Nor was the poor man much to blame, I think, finding his favourite daughter sitting in the dusk of the evening with a man, whom, to his certain knowledge, she had seen but twice before in her life, lying at her feet and



clasping her hand, apparently unforbidden. It is rather a truism to say that things that occur seldom impress us a great deal more than things that occur frequently. If there were a thunderstorm or an earthquake every day we should think nothing of those catastrophes. It was so very rarely that my father was angry with me, that I was in a state of proportionable awe and wholesome fear when such a *contre-temps* did arise. I snatched away my hand and jumped up.

"Papa's coming," I gasped.

Mr., or as I afterwards heard he was, Major M'Gregor, did not appear much discomfited. He raised himself from his reclining posture, and went to meet my father. The latter on his part raised his hat very stiffly, and said, with a polite elaboration and distinctness which I thought very unnecessary, "How do you do, Sir? This is a most unexpected pleasure. May I take the liberty of asking your name?"

"My name is M'Gregor," said Richard, taking off his hat also, but not stiffly, and reddening a little, "and I must apologize for coming at such an untimely hour, but the fact was, Mrs. Coxe intrusted me with a message to your daughter, and after I had delivered it I took the liberty of asking to be allowed to see your garden, of which I had heard so much, and which Miss Lestrangle was kind enough to show me."

A tissue of fibs, listened to by me with open-mouthed, wide-eyed amazement. Could my hero tell lies? My father did not seem mollified. He said "Humph!" very gruffly, planted himself in the middle of the path between me and the stranger, and looked



ostentatiously at his watch, as much as to say, "When is the fellow thinking of taking himself off?"

The *fellow* took the broad hint. "I'm detaining you," said he, politely; and after turning to me, and saying, with a fund of amusement in his face, "I hope you won't forget Mrs. Coxe's message," he again lifted his hat and walked away.

Papa and I followed slowly in his wake, I quaking, yet angry. My father was the first to speak.

"I don't like this sort of thing at all," said he, with irritation, "and what's more, it must not occur again. You're very young and inexperienced, Nell, and I dare say you meant no harm, but I wonder that even *you* did not think it was not very nice or maidenly to be out at nine o'clock at night with that big fellow sprawling at your feet, to say nothing of holding your hand!"

I felt disposed to weep, till he came to the word *sprawling*; that obnoxious dissyllable made me choke back my indignant tears.

"What was he doing with your hand?" pursued my father, still more severely.

"I'm sure I don't know," stammered I. "I suppose he was going to bid me good-by."

I really had not strength of mind to reveal the truth and expose the folly I had been guilty of, with regard to that most absurd proposition of friendship.

"Puppy!" exclaimed my father, fuming and working himself up into a passion. "He wants a good kicking, that's what he does. Uncommon free and easy, indeed! Walking into another man's garden, without saying '*by* your leave,' or '*with* your leave!' Those



may be Manchester or Brummagem manners, but they won't go down here, I can tell him."

"He is not Manchester or Brummagem," said I, gasping, and without the slightest feeling of the ridiculous.

"Well, Brummagem or no," retorted my father, "he won't come here again in a hurry I can tell him!" and he stopped and struck his stick upon the ground to emphasize his remark.

"I should not think he'd wish to do so, after the way you treated him," I could not help saying.

"Perhaps not, perhaps not! So much the better!" replied my father, still at boiling point.

We had by this time reached the house. I stalked upstairs, with my head up, and on reaching my room, threw myself on my bed, in a passion of mortified angry tears.

I "unmaidenly," and he "Brummagem!" Which epithet was worst?

## CHAPTER VI.

I HAVE lived now more than twenty years, and have seen much of the evil and much of the good (there is a good deal of the latter, after all) that there is in the world. I have often been led to ponder upon the comparative bearableness or unbearableness of the various burdens laid upon the shoulders of poor humanity. After much deliberation, after changing my opinion five or six times: after looking at the subject from every point of view; after considering all the *pros* and *cons*, counting one by one, as the Preacher says, I have come to the conclusion that the heaviest load



under which man groans is poverty. By poverty I do not mean comfortable, decent poverty, which pays ready money, which keeps a parlour-maid instead of butler and footman, which walks instead of drives, buys cotton gowns instead of silk dresses for its wife, which sends its sons to Cheltenham and Cambridge, instead of Eton and Christ Church; but the bugbear I have before me is poverty such as ours was — the poverty of living in a wide house — not with a brawling woman — but worse, with a very narrow income; the poverty which dares not look on from month to month and from day to day, before whose inner eyes bum-bailiffs are ever present; the poverty which steals away our cheerful spirits; which renders us envious, and spiteful, and sordid; which makes our days a long torture, and our nights a long vigil; which saps the springs of our life, and sometimes ends by making us cut our throats to escape it! The death of friends is a far sharper grief, of course, while it lasts: then the light goes out in the heavens, and we sit among the ashes and curse the day in which we were born; but the people whom we love *intensely*, whose existence or non-existence is of any very vital importance to our daily happiness, are so extremely few, that such devouring sorrows come ordinarily but three or four times in a life of sixty years. A sharp stab at rare intervals is better than a running sore festering perpetually.

On the morning after my unmaidenly behaviour, I was in the hall of our old house, and the morning sun was shining through the stained glass windows (through Abel's head and Cain's legs, queerly depicted thereon) on the faded Turkey carpet. As usual, I was sitting on the floor; I had a big darning-needle between my



fingers, and was slowly and unskilfully mending stockings. It was an occupation I particularly disliked; it was a real penance to me; but having no lady's maid, I had to undergo it weekly. And as I darned and pricked myself, and grumbled at fate, I heard a door which led to the offices creak on its hinges, and saw a head peer inquiringly round it — the head of our old cook and housekeeper. She had been with us twenty years; she was as good a soul as ever trussed a chicken or concocted *entremets*, and I loved her; but at the present moment she was to me a most unwelcome apparition. I had already ordered dinner, so I knew she could have come with but one fell object, namely, to get money for some of the numerous tradesmen who were *kind* enough to throng our doors.

"If you please, 'm, I want to speak to you," said the head, cautiously.

"Do you?" said I, with a sickening heart. "Come in then, there's nobody here."

Thus reassured, the head and the body that belonged to it, came forward into the room, and both together stood before me — sleek, middle-aged, like a respectable tabby.

"Well?" said I, looking up from amid my hose, "what is it?"

"If you please, 'm, the butcher" (she pronounced the word as if the first syllable were the preposition *but*) "has come."

"Oh, indeed! How kind of him!" said I.

"Yes, 'm, he has; and he has not brought the right piece of beef. If you remember, you ordered the ribs, and he has brought the sir-*line*; he never brings us the



prime pieces now either; he says he has to keep 'em for his larger customers."

"It cannot be helped," said I, resignedly. At nineteen, sirloin or ribs are indifferent to one.

"That's not all, 'm; I'm sorry to say," pursued Mrs. Smith, rather aggravated by my stoicism, "he's brought his bill again."

"I wish he and his bill were at Jericho," responded I, tartly.

"He says that this is the ninth time he has brought it in, and he wants to have it paid."

"Want must be his master," said I, briefly.

"But he says he *must* have it paid; that he's got a very 'eavy engagement to meet next week, and he cannot do without the money."

"They always say that," replied I, surveying ruefully a yawning chasm in the heel of my stocking.

"Indeed, 'm, I think they do; but, if you please, what am I to tell him? he's waiting."

"Tell him that I shall be most happy to pay his bill if he'll only show me how; that I cannot coin money, and I haven't got a farthing in the world, except the crooked sixpence on my chain, which he is most welcome to, if he likes to take it."

"I'm afraid I could not tell him that, 'm; but if you could manage to give him just a little something towards it — just to put him off a bit."

"I tell you it's out of the question," said I, eagerly. "I'm telling you the literal truth; I have not got a halfpenny in the world. I gave you my last shilling last week, for that man who came with coals; and papa told me he could not give me any more till the end of next month."



"Eh, dear! it's a bad job — a bad job!" moaned our *chef de cuisine*, shaking her elderly head; "and I don't 'alf like going back empty-handed to the man — he's none too civil, I can tell you!"

"None too civil! isn't he?" exclaimed I, indignantly, regardless of grammar. "The wretch! why don't you turn him out of the house?"

But Mrs. Smith's sense of justice revolted against this ladylike proposition.

"Nay, my dear," said she, mildly remonstrative, "we could not quite do that, I'm thinking. After all, the man's only come to look after his own, and if we was to turn him out o' doors, a pretty character he'd give of us, all over the place! Why, we should have the whole lot on 'em about our ears afore you could say Jack Robis'n!"

We remained silent a minute or two, Mrs. Smith rubbing her chin reflectively, as if to gain inspiration from that feature, or features — for she had two of them, while wild ideas of writing a book, for which emulous publishers should outbid each other, of marrying a certain snuffy old bachelor uncle of the Coxes, and making him settle three-fourths of his income on papa, coursed through my brain. At last Mrs. Smith spoke:

"My dear, would you mind speaking to your papa about it?"

I interrupted her.

"I should mind very much; I don't know anything I should mind much more."

"Well 'm, you know something must be done, and perhaps he has got some money you don't know of — just a trifle would do, to stop the man's mouth for the present, and there's no harm in asking. Do now;



there's a dear young lady. There he goes down the garden. Eh, dear! he stoops sadly of late."

"I *won't*," said I, vehemently, "and that's flat. He's in very bad spirits this morning as it is, and I won't do anything to add to his annoyances if I can help it. I'll see you, and the butcher too, at the bottom of the Red Sea first."

Baffled in her little plan, Mrs. Smith stood the image of black despair in a lilac cotton gown, and bumbailiffs crowded thick and fast before my mind's eye. At last I said, gulping down my pride:

"Mrs. Smith, don't you think that if you were to go to him, and tell him that we are very sorry, but that we really don't happen to have any money by us at present, and if you were to speak very civilly to him, don't you think you might persuade him to wait till next week? by next week," said I, resolutely, "I'll get the money as sure as I sit here, by hook or by crook."

"I can but try," she answered, being the essence of good-nature; "but I'm sadly afraid it won't be no good."

She disappeared despondent behind the swing-door, and I went back to my darning. Duns were such every-day visitors, that as long as I could keep them away from papa I bore their attentions with tolerable equanimity. After a considerable interval my messenger returned, with her visage somewhat shortened.

"Well?" said I, interrogatively.

"He's gone, 'm, drabbit 'im!" said she, with her one little pet imprecation — an imprecation which always rather puzzled me as to its precise signification, etymology, and derivation. What awful malediction was contained in the imperative mood of the verb "to



drabbit!" "I've got him out of the house at last, indeed, I had hard work to manage it. He cuss'd and swore above a bit, that he did. I was ashamed out of my life that them girls should hear him; and he said, said he, 'Mrs. Smith,' said he, 'there's not another man in all ———shire as u'd a been as patient and forbearin' as I've been,' said he; and here's his bill, 'm; he desired me pertikler to give it into your own 'ands."

I took it; £ 34 5s. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

"The halfpenny be demmed," said I, with dreary jocularly, quoting Mr. Mantalini. "Well, will he wait till next week?"

"Not he, 'm; he would not hear tell of it nohow; he's coming again on Tuesday; he'd a come on Monday, only it's Nantford fair, and he says if he don't get his bill settled satisfactorily then, he'll go straight off to the master and 'ave it out with him."

"Pleasant!" said I, ironically. "I wish he and the baker and the candlestickmaker may all come to some horrible end soon, that I do! Spontaneous combustion, or something of the sort. They are the bane of my existence!"

However, I had got a reprieve, though a very short one; it's better to be going to be hanged to-morrow, than to be hanged to-day. I was young and possessed of boundless spirits, which, when the immediate pressure of any anxiety was removed, rose elastic as an india-rubber ball, trusting implicitly in something turning up. I am bound to admit that nothing ever did turn up, but that did not lessen my faith in the *potentialities*, as Carlyle would call them, of the future.



## CHAPTER VII.

THIRTY-FOUR pounds, five shillings, and fourpence halfpenny is a large sum for a person without present income or future prospects, to procure within three days. So I thought as I sat through that long forenoon, racking my brains to find out ways and means for obtaining that sum, or even a part of it. But I racked my brains in vain; no inspiration came to them; nothing turned up. I had nobody that I could borrow, or hope to borrow from. I was, it is true, possessed of two well-to-do aunts, but they were vestals of the stingiest, who as long as I could remember anything, had never given me or Dolly a farthing's worth, with the exception of two bone brooches, coloured crimson, and representing fruit and flowers; brooches vast in size, but infinitesimal in value, and which they had borne all the way, across sea and land, from Rome for us, as characteristic mementoes of the Eternal City. I felt that I had rather die than be beholden to their niggard charity.

I ran over in my mind all my few poor worldly possessions, to find something vendible among them; but to no purpose. I had no jewels, Dolly having appropriated all our mother's ornaments, before I was of an age to care much whether she appropriated them or not. The sole thing which I possessed that could by any possibility be worth more than a few shillings, was a large unwieldy old watch, which had belonged to my maternal grandmother — a watch with a jewelled case with queer figures chased in gold upon it, and which I wore every day for want of a better, though



it kept a time of its own, or, as often as not, no time at all. The idea of selling this ancient timepiece did occur to me, but I dismissed it as impossible. Who would buy such an old warming-pan? and, moreover, who should I see to offer it to?

As the hours stole on I grew very down-hearted. Tuesday morning would be here directly, and with it the Furies, in the shape of that accursed butcher in his blue blouse. Despite all my anxious precautions, he would get access to my dear old father, and would dun and torment him, and make him even more miserable than he was now, though, God knows, there was no need for that.

My father and I had by this time quite made up our little differences; we never could be at war with one another for more than an hour, and we had taken our diurnal stroll about the premises, to inspect the stock, and say what we had said yesterday, and what we should say to-morrow about it. We had thought the red cow looking invalidish, and had ordered her a bran mash; we had, in imagination, sold five or six of our best porkers, and got fabulous prices for them; we had doomed the black pullets to an untimely death, and had administered his daily carrot to the old gray cob. And now my father had gone back to his books, and there would be no tearing him away from them for the rest of that day.

We dined at one, and did not have tea till eight; so that the afternoon spread in rather dreary perspective before my mind's eye; rather an inconveniently long period of time for a young lady, who had no more pleasing occupation than that of meditating on her own and her father's liabilities.

It was an oppressive, sultry sort of day, rather de-



pressing to the spirits. The sun had gone out of sight somewhere, though there did not appear to be any particular cloud to hide him; and a dim, dull haze, which might be prophetic of either thunder, blight, or increased heat, enveloped all except the nearest objects. It was stifling in the house, and I betook myself to the garden, and strolled rather disconsolately between the luxuriant borders. But the garden did not please me to-day, I seemed to know every twig in it so intimately. I had not energy for gardening, and, moreover, had memories connected with my last essay in that line which I did not care to dwell upon.

A low fence divided our grounds from a field of green corn, and over this fence I climbed, and sauntered through the young barley to a small fir wood at the other side of it. Ordinarily, I was not fond of taking solitary walks, having a wholesome fear of beggarmen, loose horses, &c.; but I did not dread an encounter with any such alarming objects among those tall quiet pines. It was very cool and shady there, and I enjoyed looking through the long vista of tree aisles and arches, without any brambles or brushwood to obstruct my view; while the fallen pine needles made a pleasant carpet for my feet.

Beyond the wood, was a meadow all a-blaze with buttercups, and beyond it a garrulous brook, which was the bound of my walk. Arrived here, I sat down in the grass on the hither side, and thought of the butcher. A little rude handbridge led over the hurrying, chattering stream, and on the other side of it, right opposite to me, rose a mill, and an old farmhouse, with a range of straw beehives and a plat of blue borage under the diamond-paned windows, beside it. The



mill was at work, and the water came plunging and dashing and sparkling over the big wheel, as it turned round, dripping. I love a millwheel, and could watch it for ever; my eyes followed it now with a sort of fascination, as it moved round and round interminably, with a noise, though loud, yet eminently soothing.

My attention was distracted by a little flock of yellow velvet chickens, coming pecketting down to the water's edge, with the old hen clucking fussily in the midst of them. Then the miller's wife came out with a bowl of something in her hand, and threw handfuls to them, and I wondered whether she fed her chickens on the same things that we did ours; and then three large white ducks came swimming down the stream, paddling and quacking, and diving their sleek heads under water. But after a while the chickens wandered, scratching and picking, out of sight; the miller's wife went indoors, and I got tired of watching the ducks stand upon their heads. I yawned and took one last glance down stream, before rising to go home.

Some way down on the other side, I spied a man making his way through the thick alders — a man in brown velveteen, with a fishing-rod in his hand. During the last few days, my heart had taken to thumping loudly whenever I saw a man in the distance, opining that it might be my new friend; and consequently I had had to submit to severe disappointment as often as my hero turned out to be a game-keeper, a day labourer, or even a cowman. The seat of my affections gave its usual thud against my ribs now, and this time it was justified in so doing; the man was Major M'Gregor. Presently he emerged from the alders, looking rather hot. Then he came over the rickety



bridge, smiling. He looked very goodly, and I thought so. To this day I think he was

“The goodliest man that ever among ladies ate in hall;”  
and most assuredly I thought so that day, when

“I lifted up mine eyes,  
And loved him with that love that was my doom;”

for love him I did, though I have not said much about it, as it is no use dwelling on unpleasant truths.

Like a little fool as I was, I pretended not to see him, and turned my head, surmounted by its ragged brown hat, perseveringly down stream, and tried to appear immersed in the contemplation of the trout leaping half their own length out of the water, after the flies under the dipping elders, and then flopping back again. But all the same; I need hardly say that I heard his feet coming through the long sweet grass, as plainly as ever I heard cannon-ball or thunderclap.

“De do, Miss Lestrangle?” said a jolly voice beside me, abbreviating the Briton’s customary greeting to his fellow, after the manner of the young.

The brown hat and the reddened face it shaded veered round from the study of the trout, and two youthful and embarrassed lips responded, “How do you do?” in return, and a ladylike hand, in a most unladylike glove, perforated with many holes, went out to meet Major M’Gregor’s large one — went out shyly but gladly.

“I hope you did not intend to cut me,” said he, laughing; “you looked away so perseveringly when I took off my hat to you on the other side, that I felt almost afraid of coming near you.”

“I did not see you,” I began, hastily; “at least



— at least” and there I stopped having expressed myself with my usual lucid coherency, and being fully aware of it.

“Well, never mind!” said he, good-naturedly, trying to put me at my ease. “I’ll forgive you, if you did mean to cut me, on condition that you won’t send me away now,” and a pair of dark honest gray eyes looked at me, in a beseeching and insinuating manner, to which at Lestrangle Hall I had not been accustomed, and which I thought pleasant, though extremely odd. I plucked up my spirits, and determined to revolt against the dominion of gawkinsness, and be sprightly.

“I could not send you away, if I had wished ever so much,” said I. “This meadow is not mine, nor yet the grass nor the buttercups: you have as much right to be here, I suppose, as I have.”

“But do you wish to send me away?” Silence. “Do you, Miss Lestrangle?” Silence still. “Do you?” rather impatiently, bending down to look at my face.

I perceived his eagerness, and was elated by it. He wished me to say “No,” so I would say “Yes.” A spirit of graceful contradiction entered into me. Why should I not be *agaçante*, and *espiègle*, and two or three other nice French adjectives whose exact meaning I should have been puzzled to define. So I looked up into his anxious countenance, and said laughingly:

“Yes, I do wish to send you away.”

“All right,” said he, calmly; “then I’ll go,” and he picked up the fishing-rod he had tossed down on the grass, took off his hat, and went.

I have experienced a good many moments of mortification in my life — of course we all have — but I doubt whether I ever felt one more bitter, or more com-



pletely undiluted by any dash of sweetness. This was the result of my archness then. Why, oh why had not I kept to my native stupidity? I had got on much better then. When I attempted to be funny, it was like a cow standing on her hind legs — nobody could understand what she would be after.

In the impulse of the moment, I sprang to my feet, intending to run after him, but I was held back by the remembrance of my mature age, and of what the best of fathers would say, were he to see me coursing round the big field after the "Brummagem young man," to whom he had so strong an objection. So I sank down on the grass again, and the silly tears stole into my eyes as I watched my Richard walking huffily off, without looking once back at me. He did not walk particularly well, but much as dismounted dragoons usually do; but to me his gait seemed that of an offended angel.

The trout might have leaped up into the trees above them, and sat there singing, for all the notice I should have taken of them now. A faint hope lingered in my breast that he might relent — might come back — that I might see him pushing through the elders, and the wych-elms again; and in this hope I stayed there disconsolate till the dew fell, and the flowers went to sleep, and the June moon came up behind the fir wood. There I sat, thinking of dear, dear Richard, and of the butcher, and weeping over them both.

That was Saturday; need I say that next day was Sunday — a day on which most people dine early, and many people have roast beef for dinner. Morning service at Lestrange Church began at eleven, and commenced with a hymn, which I led. My voice, as I said once



before, was my strongest point — my strongest but one, perhaps. On mature deliberation, I think that my eyes were my strongest. Anyhow, it was a rich, full contralto, and some of the low notes were, I flattered myself, almost as deep as those of a man.

Our choir was not large: it consisted of myself, two or three of our servants, who laboured under a fear of making too much noise, and consequently did not make enough; the clerk, and a young carpenter, who was too ambitious of introducing turns and trills and flourishes of his own composition into the simple old tunes. Often and often had I seen fit to skirmish with that too enterprising artificer. The church had two doors; a large and a little one; the large one, by which the bulk of the congregation came in; and a small one, by which we and two or three farmers' families made our dignified entrance. In this hot weather both doors stood wide open, and the doorways made frames for pretty little pictures of waving tree-boughs, of weather-worn stone crosses, and of daisies, opening their pink fringes upon the

“Grassy barrows of the happier dead.”

Exactly opposite the little door was our square pew, with its faded red moreen, which the morning sun was trying to fade still more; with Sir Lovelace Lestrangle's black and white marble monument glooming above it, and with many Sir Lovelaces, Sir Adrians, and Sir Brians sleeping beneath it. I had stood up, had cleared my throat, and had struck up the first line of “Jerusalem the golden.” I loved that tune, it was so sweet, and so triumphant.

“I know not; oh, I know not,”



sang I loud and clear, while the birds outside tried to rival me; and as I sang, a tall fair-haired stranger stooped his head, and came in at the low door, close to me. For a moment I felt as if I must give up "Jerusalem the golden" altogether — abandon it to the tender mercies of the trilling, roulading carpenter; but I mastered myself. I must go on, though twenty yellow-haired majors came trooping through the church portals. When we feel that a thing must be done, we generally do it.

"What radiancy of glory;  
What bliss beyond compare,"

sang I, stronger and clearer than ever. I poured my whole soul into my voice. Love and excitement supplied the place of devotion. He should hear how I *could* sing, thought I, remembering that objectionable brunette at the Coxe's party, and her pretty little treble squeak.

As I laid down my hymn-book at the conclusion of the hymn, I felt that a casual observer would find some little difficulty in distinguishing which were my cheeks and which were the red roses in my bonnet. I did not yield to the temptation of taking one look, long or short, at the lion-hearted Richard (lion-hearted is thus a second time braving my revered father), but I knew by instinct that he was in a pew over against me, in which Mr. Harris of the Home Farm had charitably given him a corner. I did not look at or towards him, and I tried honestly not to think of him — tried hard to be as sorry for my sins as I said I was — tried to implore from that God who was to me then but a dim awful abstraction, those good things for my soul, without which that soul would be so cold, so



naked, so famishing — tried to remember of how infinitesimally little account Richard M'Gregor and his beauty would be to me at the Judgment Day.

Often and often had I terrified myself with too vivid pictures of Death and Judgment as I lay wakeful on my bed, in my dark room at night; but here in the full blaze of the summer sun, I could summon but faint shadows, indistinct reflections of such pictures before my mind's eye; here youth and joy and love seemed dominant, and to keep all darker powers, baffled and worsted, in the background. So I buried my head in my big old prayer-book, which had a dried pansy between the two of its leaves, and a squashed fly between the other two, and caught myself praying earnestly, seriously, devoutly, for Queen Charlotte, the Prince Regent, and all the Royal family. I had mentally resolved that morning to abstain during the day of rest from all harassing thoughts of Mr. Jenkins the butcher. Monday should be dedicated to the consideration of ways and means, to the begging, borrowing, or stealing that obnoxious sum of £34 5s. 4½d. But to-day I would be free from sordid cares; I would try to keep my mind clear and clean from worldly thoughts. And I was moderately successful, as far as regards the butcher. But it was a very different matter when I endeavoured to close the doors of my mind against Richard; to observe the Sabbath strictly in my heart; his image pushed the door of that sanctuary *sans façon*, and dwelt there, defying expulsion, during the long morning service.

All through the sermon I looked forward with childish impatience to the meeting in the churchyard, which seemed to me almost unavoidable. I pictured



to myself how we three should stand in the church path under the ash tree. Papa rather grim at first, but thawing fast into his usual natural, dear old hearty manner; I, bashful and somewhat gawky, I feared, but in the seventh heaven; and Richard ——

"Perhaps," thought I, exultantly, "papa will ask him to luncheon, and if he does," subjoined cold reflection, "there's nothing but that cold mutton bone." This last dismal idea lasted me through one whole head (the last one) of papa's brief and simple discourse.

"In conclusion," said my father — "in conclusion," echoed my heart, "there's nothing but the cold mutton." At the end of his usual twenty minutes, my father released us, and having pronounced the benediction, remained standing in the pulpit, putting his spectacles in their case, and eyeing somewhat hostilely the wolf in sheep's clothing that had stolen into his fold. Poor, naughty, handsome wolf! One lamb longed to go and put out a friendly paw to him: but lambs do not always know what is good for them. And then the little congregation trickled out by the two doors, and the farmers' wives shook hands among themselves, and the old women in black poke bonnets by themselves, and John Barlow slouched over to his mother's new tombstone, and read the inscription admiringly, having composed it himself; and then they all toddled decorously down the sunny road to the village. Behind them dawdled a disconsolate dragoon, casting, ever and anon, baffled and disconsolate looks behind him.

Meanwhile, I stood just within the church porch, tapping with my foot on the flags, above the buried head of another Eleanor Lestrangle, chafing and fuming.



It was my invariable custom to wait for my father, while he took off his gown, and usually, I had only about two seconds to wait. To-day the process of disrobing seemed a lengthier one. Perhaps it was only my angry imagination, but I could not help fancying that papa loitered purposely over his ungowning; purposely seduced old Iken into one of his long maunders.

"Toothless old nuisance!" said I, stamping on Eleanor Lestrangle's head harder than ever. But stamping and malediction did not hasten the flow of old Iken's eloquence nor diminish my father's interest in it. At length it came to a sort of stop; and my father, cheerful and chatty, and I, disappointed and choking, sauntered down the path, the figure of Richard, diminished by distance to the height of a few inches, was slowly disappearing round the corner.

"What brought that fine fellow here, to-day, I wonder?" said my father affably, looking after him. I made no response, but gnawed the ivory top of my parasol in a silent mortification. There came no wolf to afternoon service at Lestrangle church, and old Iken beginning another long rigmarole, was summarily repressed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

ABOUT five o'clock on that Sunday, I was passing through the hall, dragging my feet after me in a languid and dispirited manner, like the devil

"Trailing his nerveless tail,  
On the shore by the Red Sea sand,"

when my father called to me from the library —

"Nell! Nell! is that you?"



"Yes," said I, and ran in.

He was sitting in his old arm-chair among his books, and looked up as I made my appearance at the door.

"Oh! it is you, is it?" said he. "I want you to do something for me."

"Yes," said I, inquiringly.

"I promised to send old Widow Boyle some broth to-day, and I want to know whether you'll take it?"

"With the greatest pleasure," rejoined I, briskly, glad of some occupation, and of an excuse for deserting "A Narrative of a Mission to the Jews," which entertaining work had been my Sunday reading for the last seven years. Whereupon I vanished from my parent's eyes.

Having obtained from Mrs. Smith a small tin can, filled with a greasy-looking and untempting liquid, supposed to be mutton broth, and having received with meekness her exhortations not to spill it over my Sunday gown, I set off. Up a steep field of beans, and down a steeper one of clover, across a little common tenanted by a very thin donkey, belonging to a tinker; then down a narrow lane, with high red sandstone banks and deep cartruts, and then I found myself at Widow Boyle's gate, with a mixed flavour of pigs and of that objectionable herb called southernwood, or old man, in my small nose. Having poured my broth into a bowl brought me for that purpose by Mr. Boyle's relict, and having received that gentlewoman's thanks, my tin can and I set off home again.

We went very slowly, I scrambling now and again up the steep red banks after big primroses, shining in clusters in their starry paleness. I gathered a great



bunch of them, ruthlessly tearing them from the homes where God had put them. Then I sat down on the grass by the roadside, and set to making an orderly nosegay of them. Two children came by presently with more primroses; then two sweethearts — the man sheepish, the girl giggling; and then, oh, then! — what in the world brought him there I never could make out — then a great big noble-looking young soldier, whose name was Richard M'Gregor. Apparently, he had not got over his huffiness, nor forgiven me; for he made as though he would have passed me, merely raising his hat; but I could not suffer that. Nature and impulse would have their way; this time I jumped up (and the primroses and the tin can jostled and hustled one another into a deep cartrut), ran across to him, and put out a most eager hand.

"Oh, please," said I, panting, "I hope you're not angry with me; I'm sorry I was so rude yesterday."

That man must have been colder than a statue who could resist two full soft lips begging with such pretty humility; and coldness of temperament was certainly not one of my sweetheart's vices or virtues.

The expression of huffy dignity melted out of his face — melted into the honestest, joyfullest smile.

"Who told you you were rude?" he asked. "I did not, I'm sure."

"No, but you thought so, or you would not have gone away so suddenly."

"What could I do but go, when you sent me?"

I hung down my head.

"One does not always *quite* mean what one says," I said, slowly.

"Does not one? I'm glad to hear you say so; you



*did* make me rather unhappy, I'll tell you that now; though, perhaps, you'll only use your knowledge to torment me a little more."

"I don't wish to torment anybody," I said, gently. "I've told you already I did not mean what I said; I was only joking; I meant to have told you so after church this morning, only old Iken kept papa talking so long."

"I shall take the liberty of breaking old Mr. Iken's head for him next time I have the pleasure of meeting that old gentleman."

"He is rather tiresome," I said, "he's so deaf and stupid; but you believe what I said to you, don't you?" and I looked up earnestly at him.

"I don't know," he said, laughing; "I'll see about it. I'm of rather a sceptical nature; I never believe anything without proof."

"What proof can I give you?" I asked, eagerly. He became grave.

"You can let me walk home with you?"

"Oh, certainly," replied I, with alacrity, "it's not five minutes walk from here to our gate."

His countenance fell a little.

"Not five minutes walk?" he repeated. "Well, anyhow, let us walk very slow, and make it ten minutes. Are those your flowers that are all tumbled about there? Let me pick them up for you."

I sat on the grass, and watched him as he did so, and gave him the biggest, sweetest primrose star I could find, as a reward, at his request. Then his eyes looked into mine, and spake softly to them, and his lips said:



"Don't go yet, please. As you are strong, be merciful."

I was merciful; I began to feel a person of some importance, and accorded him this favour also, very graciously. Nothing short of a miracle could bring papa here, I thought.

"Don't you find Sunday afternoon awfully long?" he asked, yawning. "I never have the least idea what to do with myself down here. Coxe is a rare good fellow, but he is not an over-lively companion; and Mrs. Coxe (sandy-haired Mrs. Coxe, d'you recollect?) is a little too fond of the peerage to suit my taste."

I was a little nettled. "If you find us so dull in this part of the world, I wonder you do not leave us. I cannot imagine what keeps you?"

"Cannot you?" said he, a little coldly. Then he went on in the same tone as before —

"Come, confess that you go to bed an hour earlier on Sundays than other days (everybody does), and that you are a little tired of reading sermons all day."

"I don't read sermons all day," I responded, gravely. "I read one to the servants, and sometimes, not very often, one to myself; but most of the afternoon I'm feeding the chickens, and seeing the cows milked, and that sort of thing."

"That does not sound very lively."

"One does not need to be very lively on Sundays," I answered, rather dogmatically.

"Does not one? I do not much know what one ought, and what one ought not to do; I wish you'd teach me."

"Teach you what?"



"Oh, I don't know; it does not matter what — anything. I should like to be taught by you."

I looked down, and plucked nervously at my flowers. Is this the way young men always talk to girls, I wondered?

"You would not be a very hard school-mistress, would you?" pursued he, leaning his head on his hand, with his hat tilted over his eyes.

I laughed a little.

"It's a good idea my teaching anybody anything. I'm the greatest dunce in Europe."

"You are a very pretty dunce," said he, slowly and emphatically. The colour rushed into my cheeks. It could not be right to allow him to say such things to me — such pleasant, untrue things, especially. I flashed an indignant look at him, and gathered up my flowers, preparatory to going.

"You ought not to say such things to me," said I, vehemently, "it's not right. I'm not pretty, and you know I'm not; and you're either laughing at me, or you think I'm a poor countrified simpleton, who will believe anything you like to tell her."

He flushed a little too, and half rose from his reclining posture.

"I wish to Heaven there were more such countrified simpletons," said he, speaking with as much vehemence as I had done. "You always *will* misunderstand me, — always *will* think that I mean to insult you. It may be impertinent of me — I know it is, but I cannot help it. I forget my manners when I am with you. You *are* pretty — awfully pretty, and I cannot, for the life of me, help telling you so. There! be as angry with me now as you please."



He was excited, and reddened through all his sunburntness, as he uttered this last clause resignedly, awaiting a fresh burst of wrath from me. But no such burst came. I stood dumbfounded. Here, then, was one of those eccentric individuals mentioned ironically by Dolly. Here was some one in whose eyes red hair and a wide mouth were recommendations. There was an awkward pause.

"Well," said he, softly, at last, rather embarrassed, "are you very angry? Have I sinned quite past forgiveness?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure," I said, in confusion, turning away my burning face, "I — I — don't suppose you have *sinned*, as you call it, at all — only you startled me a little. I'm not used to having those — those sort of things said to me, and — and I think I'll go home now."

I rose as I spoke, and armed myself with my can.

"No, *please* don't," said he, very eagerly. "I'll promise not to be rude again. I'll bite my tongue out first. Only *do* stop five minutes longer. I've got so many things to say to you."

"You must say them some other time," said I, hurriedly.

"Ay, that's the rub!" he answered, standing before me, with an anxious look in his gray eyes. "What other time? Am I always to have to trust to chance? May I never come to see you in your own home?"

I looked down, and kicked a little pebble about.

"Why do you ask me?" I said. "How can I tell?"

"Who can I ask then? — your father? You know



how pleased he was to see me the other night. He was longing to turn me out of the garden; I saw it in his face. Can you deny it?"

I hesitated, and swung my tin can backwards and forwards.

"I don't deny it," I said at last, slowly, "that is to say — I don't mean about the turning you out; but I think he thought that you — that I — ought not to have stayed there in the garden without him. I don't know why he was displeased, I'm sure. I don't think we did much harm."

I looked up innocently at him, to gather his opinion on the subject of our common iniquity, and I really believe that I was not aware that my big blue eyes looked rather well with that air of childish inquiry in them. Richard *was* aware of that fact; looking back now, with the advantage of increased experience of that queer biped, man, I think he was.

"Harm!" said he, warmly. "I should think not indeed. He would be a pretty brute that could do you any harm. There! if I'm not offending again—breaking my promise, and making pretty speeches. By Jove! I cannot help it."

I dissected a primrose carefully.

"Papa is so very, *very* seldom angry with me — hardly ever, but he really *was* displeased that night. He said it must never occur again."

Richard stroked his tawny moustache meditatively.

"I'm not sure that he was not right. I have no doubt he thought I was taking a great liberty—which I was — and trying to get up an underhand — ahem! — ahem! — acquaintance with you, which I was not. I never like doing things underhand. I should like to



come and call on him to-morrow, only I don't well see how I could. Tell me, did he call me any very hard names behind my back that unlucky evening?"

The ragged brown hat was unable to conceal the scarlet hue that my youthful and ingenuous countenance assumed at this awkward query. My blushes during this interview succeeded each other so rapidly that they almost made one continuous blush.

Face and figure, the cut of his clothes, and the tone of his voice, all were so very *un-Brummagem*, that I could not induce my lips to frame the obnoxious epithet that my sire had applied to him.

"Never mind," said he, laughing carelessly. "I see he did. Well, perhaps he'll think a little better of me some day. We must live in hopes."

"I think," said I, shyly, "I'm sure he'd like you if he were to know you better."

"I'm glad you think I improve upon acquaintance; perhaps *you* did not think much of me then, when we meditated together, yet severally, among the tombs in that pretty churchyard of yours?"

I responded not, but took out my watch to see how the time went. I was always ashamed of having no watch but that ancient warming-pan I have before described, and now endeavoured to shade it as much as possible from Richard's critical eyes with my long, slight fingers. My companion caught sight of a broad, yellow face between my shielding digits.

"What a handsome old watch!" said he, quite respectfully, to it. "An antique, isn't it?"

"I know it's antique," quoth I, pouting, and scenting ridicule where ridicule was not. "A great deal too antique to please me; so antique, that all its inside



is worn out, and I have to set it every two hours, but I cannot help it. I have not got any better, so I must wear it, and I wish you would not laugh at it."

So I, rapid and injured, disregarding punctuation: to me, Richard:

"If I was laughing, it was a convulsive grin — a contortion of the facial muscles. May I look at it? Thanks. Yes, it is an antique, and rather valuable one, I fancy. This sort of chasing is very rare now-a-days. A connoisseur would give you a pot of money for it."

"Would he? you don't mean *really*?" said I, greedily.

"I do indeed; the way I know anything about it is that *the mum* — my mother, I mean — is as mad as two hatters, poor old lady, on the subject of articles of *vertù*, as she calls them, and I hear so much jargon about them at home, from her and the girls, that I have picked up one or two scraps of information, whether I would or no; my mother would go wild over this turnip, though it *is* an uncommon ugly one."

Hope with her anchor, and a fat man with a cleaver, danced a jig before my mind's eye.

"Do you think — have you any idea — would your mother *buy* it, do you think?" I stopped, quivering at my own audacity.

"You don't mean to say you want to sell an old heirloom like that?" why I'm sure it must have belonged to your people for centuries."

"I don't know about that," said I, with great *sang froid*, "and I don't care much either. It belonged to a grandmother of mine, whom I never saw, and whom



I daresay I should not have liked if I had seen her; I hate old women generally."

"I'm fast getting new lights on your character," said Dick, "what a mercenary person you must be! Are you sure that you have not got some Hebrew blood in your veins?"

"Oh no, *indeed* I'm not mercenary," I cried, sorely distressed. "Please don't say that, and I do assure you we never had anything to say to the Jews, but I do want some money *very, very* badly just now."

A mist of tears came before my eyes as I thought of my old daddy, worried into his grave before his time, by sordid cares.

If ever astonishment depicted itself on a human countenance, it did then on the pleasing exterior of that much amazed dragoon. Then an inkling of the truth dawned upon him; perhaps he called to mind some of the many rumours he must have heard of our poverty, which was indeed not unknown to fame. For a minute compassion, sincere, surprised compassion, clouded his glad young eyes.

"If you do really want to get rid of it," said he, kindly affecting to ignore my tearful eagerness; "I can easily take it up to town with me next time I go. There are lots of shops where I could dispose of it for you with the greatest ease, if you'd only give me time; there's no great hurry about it, I suppose?"

"Oh, but indeed there is," said I, clinging to this new hope like a drowning man to a straw; "if I don't get the money to-morrow, it will do me no good. I — I — want it for a particular purpose — to — to buy something for myself." This I said in my astuteness, to put him off the scent of the butcher.



"*To-morrow!*" said he, opening his gray eyes very wide, "that is a short allowance of time; why, in the first place, I should have to go up to town about it."

"Would you? Oh, but indeed I could not think of putting you to so much expense and trouble for me," I said compunctiously.

"Trouble, a fiddlestick! I shall be glad of an excuse to air my brains a bit; I think some of the fluff and flue of Coxe's cotton mills is getting into them; but *by to-morrow!*"

"Tuesday morning would do: Tuesday morning early; but indeed I'm asha ———"

"Will you be so kind as to be silent? silence is woman's best ornament; do you know that? and I see that you are going to say something foolish. Well, I'll make no rash promises, but I'll do my best, and glad of the job!"

"You're — you're very good to me, and I'm sure I cannot imagine why," said I, and up went my blue eyes in a reverent rapture to his face.

"I *am* good, a very good boy indeed. I wonder you never found that out before, but if I do succeed, as I hope I shall, how am I to let you know that I have?"

"Ah, to be sure!"

"Would you mind meeting me here, or somewhere else to-morrow evening? I'm sorry to trouble you, but I don't see how else it's to be done."

"I'd rather not," said I, in a mumbling manner.

"Why?"

Many pebbles kicked about, the lid of the can removed and replaced three several times. "If I were



to ask papa's leave, he'd say no, and if I did not, it would be sly underhand!"

"Probity personified! Must I then come to Lestrange, and run the risk of being turned out again by an enraged parent? I'm 'exceedingly brave, particular;' but I really don't think I'm brave enough for that."

I smiled a little and shook my head.

"Must I go to the backdoor then, and bribe one of the 'young men or maidens' to take a message to you?"

"No, *certainly not*," with emphasis.

"What must I do then? I'm amenable to orders." No suggestions for a while, then I, with diffidence —

"Could not you — would you mind sending the money, if you have any, in an envelope, by post, I mean?"

"I *could*, certainly, but as you said just now, I'd rather not."

"I thought you said you were amenable to orders," said I, with an attempt to be smart, which sat, I felt, rather ill on me.

"So I am to most orders, but not to this one; the exception, you know, proves the rule; come let us split the difference; I won't ask you to leave your own grounds, just come and meet me at the bottom of your garden, where that hedge of lilac bushes is, you know. I won't detain you a minute, I promise, and upon my soul, *I don't bite*; say yes, *do*; y—e—s, yes; you cannot conceive how easy it is to pronounce."

"Yes."

"Well, you *are* laconic, but it's very good of you, all the same, and I'll never tease you again, hanged if I will! On Wednesday, I'm coming openly in the eye



of day, to pay my respects under Mrs. Coxe's wing. I daren't come without Mrs. Coxe, and as it is, I shall feel something like a naughty little boy come to beg pardon."

As he spoke I had been detaching my watch from the chain, and now gave it into his hands.

"I *will* go now," I said. "Don't keep me a minute longer, or perhaps pa may be after me."

"Not a minute — but stay, don't forget to be in the garden, somewhere about nine to-morrow. No great hardship surely, these spring evenings. Star-gazing is ——"

"Good-by," said I, cutting short the thread of his eloquence, and holding out my hand.

"Good-by," said he, squeezing it till all my fingers seemed crushed into one painful mass. But I bore it like a man; not a groan revealed my agony.

"Then, like a blast away I passed,  
And no man saw me more."

## CHAPTER IX.

Is it possible that one is through the whole course of one's life the same individual being? Is one possessed of but one individual soul? Does it not rather seem that each man or woman is in himself or herself a succession of individual beings, possessing, one after another, several successive souls? Our body is the same body at fifty as it was at five, and as it will be at seventy — the same, subject only to the changes and modifications made by time, weather, sickness, or mode of life. Wonderful as it seems, the fat, pink, dimpling baby body is the same as the withered old



yellow carcase tottering into the long-expecting tomb; but our soul — is it the same? I trow not. Our estimate of things and people, our habits, tastes, dispositions, at certain periods of our life are so radically different from, and totally antagonistic to, what they are at other such periods, that I think it is hardly possible that their variations should be accounted for by any of the alterations that it is within the province of time, sorrow, or any change of inner or outer life to effect.

Perhaps, at certain epochs in our history, separated by varying periods of time, a new soul (in our sleep, may be) passes into our body, each successive soul sadder than the last. A more nonsensical, puerile idea never entered a human head, I'm aware; but here it is, and I cannot cast it out. *Can I, can I* be the same individual soul, the same *ego* as that girl who stood one May morning on a ladder, nailing monthly roses up against the hall windows at dear old Lestrangle? There I stood, in a faded green muslin, with a hammer in one hand and a nail in the other, humming softly to myself as I hammered. A party of young starlings stared at me from their residence under the eaves, and opened their great yellow mouths wide, expecting me to pop worms into them, as their mamma was in the habit of doing.

"The summer hath its heavy cloud;  
The rose leaf must fall,"

I sang under my breath to myself. "Rose leaf must fall," indeed. I wish it did not, for they make a sad litter on the border; I must make some *pot pourri* of them. I suppose the roses in Eden never fell or withered. What an odd idea? I wonder how that



was managed. Were there always fresh roses coming out, and the old ones flowering on eternally? How the bushes must have overblown themselves.

“But in our land joy wears no shroud,  
Never doth it pall.  
Ne—ever do—oth it pa—all.”

A strong wind had been blowing all night, that had loosened half the rose boughs; but now all was still — still and calm as the sleep of the just. Far off I heard the dull drowsing burr of a threshing machine at work, and the bow-wow-ow of a little dog that felt himself insulted, coming from a distant farm; nearer, our gardening man, mowing the dewy lawn, and beheading a thousand daisies; nearer still, two wood-pigeons in our wood, telling their sweet prosy love tale to one another interminably — cooroo, cooroo, cooroo. cooroo; nearest of all, the important busy humming of a big bumble bee, going in and out of the campanula bells, stealing her honey drops from each.

I look back on that May morning, and on myself at my pretty play-work, as Eve must have looked back upon the pastimes of Paradise. I am not separated from that time by any great crime, as she was from the period of her happiness; but I think the yearning regret that filled the universal mother's bosom for the lotos-scented airs that breathed about the banks of those mystic eastern rivers, was akin to the eager longing (never to be gratified now) with which I inhale in fancy the rough western breezes blowing round old Lestrangle.

I suppose it rained there in those days; I suppose it snowed and was foggy, and cold, and dreary there in those days as much as other places — perhaps more;



but I cannot realize that now; to me it seems as if those gnarled old trees were always crowned with a glory of green leaves; as if those walls were always sunlit; as if the pinks and the sweet peas and the larkspurs flowered there all the year round. I did not think myself particularly happy in those days. That is the worst of this life — one never tastes its sweets while they are in one's mouth; it is only when they are gone, and we are chewing the bitters, and making wry faces over them, that we recognise them for what they were.

I took it as a matter of course that I was young and healthy and cheerful; to be so was the normal state of humanity, I thought. Sickness and sadness were abnormal, exceptional; why should I trouble my head about them? I had my annoyances, too; wore threadbare clothes and was gawky; and sometimes went to sleep with tears on my eyelashes — tears caused by my old daddy's stooping head and thin gray hair.

It was market day, and along the broad highway that skirted our grounds rolled gigs and tax-carts by dozens. I was continually turning my head to admire the smart bonnets of the farmers' wives, which distracted my attention sadly from my work.

Occasionally a horseman varied the programme — a farmer's boy taking a rough cart colt to water, the parson jogging along on his old roan pony, which in superannuated fatness yielded the palm to none save papa's; then a county neighbour, lazy and plethoric, ambling by to justice meeting. Presently came a sharper, brisker sound — a long swinging trot. Round veered my head again, and simultaneously the sound ceased, and I perceived that the horseman had stopped at our



gate, and was struggling to open it with his whip-handle, a measure which his steed did his best to prevent.

The steed had the best of it, too, at first, and would have had to this hour, if he had not good-naturedly given in. "Who can it be?" said I to myself. "Benbow's clerk, I suppose." Now, Benbow was my father's attorney, and his clerk was the chiefest among my bugbears, coming not infrequently on mysterious errands that cast a gloom over the establishment. I stood poised in air on the topmost rung of the ladder, and watched with interest. Under the elms came man and horse, the leaf shadows waving a shifting, dancing pattern over them till they reached the lower gate, not a hundred yards from where I was. Recognition here was certain, that is to say, if the man happened to be known to me. He was so known; but if he had been the "Mickle De'il" himself I could not have fled with more precipitancy at his aspect. I sprang from the ladder, ran into the house, through the cool drowsy hall, where the double-chinned, powdered Miss Lestranges, and the fat-faced, wigged Master Lestranges were smirking at nothing but the walls as usual, headlong into the sanctum where Mrs. Smith sat, muddling her old head over rows of illegible figures, doing those eternal accounts that never would come right.

"Mrs. Smith — Mrs. Smith!" cried I panting and aghast, "Sir Hugh Lancaster is coming down the drive, *now*, this minute, and I *know* he's coming to luncheon."

Despair on a thin young face is pathetic; on a fat, elderly one ludicrous. I laughed, but my mirth soon sank into a wail.

"Pa's so hospitable, he's certain to ask him. I never



can get him to remember that there *never* is anything for luncheon."

My companion resented this insult to our commissariat.

"Now, *Miss Lestrangle!* *Nothing?* Why, there's always the mutton, and it was only yesterday — no, the day before — that I sent you in a lovely dish of fry."

"Is there any fry to-day?" My heart leaped at the thought.

"My dear, how could there be, when you ate it all o' Saturday? and that plaguy ould butcher has not been near the place since; and for my part, the less he comes the better I'm pleased."

"I shall give the butcher," said I, superbly waving my arm, "a lesson he'll not forget in a hurry."

"I'm sure I wish you could 'm," said my companion, a little incredulously; "but had not we better be *schaming* something for luncheon?"

"Scheming the tops of our heads off will not put any meat in the larder; are there any fowls?"

"Ye — es; there's four or five of them ould Cochy hens: but they're walking about upon the yard, and it's after twelve now."

"Heavens!"

"There's the mutton," quoth she, recurring to that accursed joint.

"The mutton, Mrs. Smith!" said I, reproachfully.

"I wonder at you; that mutton has come in every day for the last fortnight to my certain knowledge, and it's literally and actually nothing but bone."

"There's eggs and bacon."

"Eggs and bacon! Merciful powers, is it come to this? My good woman, do reflect a minute, and you'll



see the absurdity of your proposition. Think of inviting Sir Hugh Lancaster to eggs and bacon! I'd as soon ask him to take a slice of dirt pie with me."

"Well, my dear, as good as 'im 'as made their dinners off 'em afore now, and been thankful. Who is them Lancasters, after all, I wonder? Cock 'em up! Not 'alf as good gentry as your pa, as eats whatever's set before him, and makes no fuss about it neither."

I stared glassily at her, and then at the ceiling, and then at the flies on the window, but nowhere did I see roast joints or succulent *entrées*. What was the use of letting one's fancy run riot among impossible dainties? Out of nothing, nothing can come. I rose in despair from the cane-bottomed chair on which I had precipitated myself, and emphasizing each clause of my sentence with my hammer, I said, solemnly —

"Eggs and bacon it must be then; but I wash my hands of them and of you. I won't witness our disgrace; I'll go to bed sooner than appear at luncheon. If I'm asked for, tell Collins to say that I'm ill; I *shall* be ill; it's enough to make any one ill."

Hereupon I went and stole on *patte de velours* past the library, where I heard Sir Hugh's jolly voice holding forth, and my father's (hardly less jolly for the time) responding. I betook myself to my little upper chamber, looking westwards, whence I had so often watched the great sun go down, sat down on the edge of my bed, forgot my troubles, and built air-castles. Of these edifices Richard was châtelain and I châtelaine; in them papa had the best suite of rooms, and from them Dolly was utterly cast out.

The hall clock struck one very gravely, as it always did. I slid from my bed to the floor, embraced



my knees with my arms, and re-commenced building. The clock struck half-past. Five minutes more, and then the door opened, and Mrs. Smith entered with a plate of thick bread and butter.

"I thought you'd be famished up here all by yourself, my dear," said she; "but indeed I don't see why you should not go down: I don't indeed."

"Quite out of the question, madam," replied I, rather indistinctly, with my mouth full of bread and butter; "by-the-by, is luncheon in?"

"I just sent it in before I came up, and a very nice luncheon too; a piece of cold roast mutton, and a beautiful dish of mashed potatoes, and plenty of eggs and bacon."

"Plenty!" ejaculated I faintly, thinking of the small and elegant dishes I had seen at the Coxian feast, "about how many?"

"Well, 'm, I thought as there was not to say much on the mutton, and as the hens is layin' pretty tidy just at present, I thought I'd better make it 'alf a dozen!"

At this juncture, another knock came at the door, and Mary, the housemaid, introduced herself.

"Please, miss, master begs as you'll go down *directly*."

"What!" cried I in a fury; "did not I tell Collins to say I was ill, if I was asked for?"

"Yes, miss, and so he did, but your pa said he did not believe as 'ow you was very bad, and he desired his love, and he begged you'd come down just to obleege him, if only for five minutes; I think I understood as the gentleman was asking for you."

I laid down my bread and butter, and groaned.



Mrs. Smith, with great presence of mind, seized a brush, and tried to plaster down my hair at each side of my face, and Mary gave two or three severe tugs to my dress, in the well-meant endeavour to lengthen it, and then I went. The gentlemen were already in the dining-room, and I felt overpowered with shyness as I opened the door and entered. As I took my seat at the head of the table, I gave one comprehensive glance at the arrangements. Our table was a very big, wide one, and the leg of mutton, which had never been a large one, was now "beautifully less." It showed like a dim speck on the vast ocean of table-cloth. I could not make the same complaint of the eggs and bacon; they filled the eye and overpowered it; they seemed to me to be like the sand that is by the sea-shore in number.

"I hope your head is better, Miss Lestrangle," said Sir Hugh, politely; he had wisely eschewed the mutton, and was eating a fat rasher with apparent relish.

"My head?" said I, raising a pair of bewildered blue eyes from my plate.

"Yes, to be sure, *your head*," put in my father, a little impatiently. "Collins told us you had a headache, and Sir Hugh is kindly asking after it; can't you understand?"

"Oh yes, I remember — oh, thanks — oh yes, it is quite well; pretty well, I mean, much better, thanks!" So I, incoherent and scarlet. Sir Hugh left me in peace after that, for which I called him blessed; left me at leisure to admire the simple hearty hospitality with which papa offered our meagre viands to our guest. He made no flimsy apologies for the poverty of the entertainment; he did not try to affect that the



fare was worse than it usually was; he was vexed indeed, as I, who knew every line of his countenance, discovered at once, but I would have defied any stranger to detect it.

Sir Hugh was a short man, but otherwise not ill-looking. He had a jolly countenance, not encumbered with any particular expression, a jolly laugh at anybody's service; enough brains to carry him decently through his very easy part in life, and not enough to make him feel uncomfortably wise in any company. Nobody had ever heard him say a clever thing, or a spiteful one. Mothers chased him, and he eluded their pursuit with so much good humour that they liked him all the better; daughters smiled at him, and he smiled back at them, but he smiled universally, which was discouraging; nobody ever accused him of having ever had his affections blighted, and yet now his dark hair was grizzling fast, and his big red house was mistressless still.

He did not love anybody in the world much, not even himself, and he liked everybody. Misfortune left him alone, because I really believe she could not find a vulnerable spot in him. Presently he spoke to me again. I think he had been casting about in his mind for a remark to make for some minutes before the remark arrived, but was not quite sure on what subject I could talk — was a little doubtful whether I could talk on any subject.

“So your sister's coming home, I hear?”

“Yes.”

“Jolly for you having her back?”

“Ye—es.”

“So dull being by oneself, isn't it?”



My courage was rising, the string of my tongue was loosed.

"No, I don't think so; I like being alone; one's thoughts are always pleasant company; pleasanter far than most of one's friends."

"Ha, ha! you mean that for a hit at me, I'm afraid; but really now I never can make out what women can have to think about, except their crotchet-work; what are your pleasant thoughts about, I wonder?"

I resented this catechism suited to the intellect of a five years' child."

"Nothing worth mentioning," I said, tartly, "neither fat cattle nor guano!"

He looked puzzled for a minute.

"Well, I suppose not. What made you pitch upon two such unlikely subjects? Oh I see! You think they are about the only subjects I am fit to talk about; ah, very good, very good!"

My father rose, looking rather vexed.

"Don't get into the habit of making rude speeches, Nell, I advise you; a sharp woman is the most odious animal in creation; come, Sir Hugh, shall we take a turn about the place?"

Sir Hugh looked as if he would have liked to have said something good-natured to me, but could not make up his mind what, and contented himself with smiling encouragingly, and then followed my father, leaving me to feel as small as ever snubbed young woman need do.

---



## CHAPTER X.

AT eight that evening, the blue summer sky hid itself behind low hanging gray clouds; at a quarter past eight, a small fine rain was pouring steadily down, settling itself to a good night's work; at half-past eight, I twisted a great coil of my red hair round my head, and slipped two wooden bead bracelets, given me by Dolly in a paroxysm of generosity, one birthday, over my wrists; these were all the preparations for meeting my love which my resources allowed of. At five minutes past nine, I ran down into the hall, took an old shawl from the cloakstand, and was searching for an umbrella, when I heard my father's slow step crossing the library floor. Instantly I disappeared. I put the shawl over my head, and ran down the gravel walk, over the shining pebbles, to the trysting-place.

There was an ornamental wooden gate in the lilac hedge; a gate separating our Eden from the profane outer world of the hay meadow. I peeped over this gate, and all about the lilac bushes; not a soul was there; my heart sank; "He cometh not," said I, quoting Marianna. I gazed disconsolately through the rain for exactly three minutes, at the end of which time, I spied an object looming dimly through the misty air; it might have been a horse or a cow, a house or a haystack. It was none of these; it resolved itself into a large laughing young man, in damp velveteen.

"Before your time," said he, gaily, as he came up, "see what it is to have sold your watch; it's five minutes to nine still." I gave him no greeting; I only looked up at him with dumb anxiety. "What, not a



word for me! I don't think I shall tell you at all, if you look so eager; it would not be good for you! Well, is the lion to come in to the lamb, or the lamb to come out to the lion?"

"Oh, the lamb — oh, I — I mean — I'll come out to you." I unlatched the gate, and passed out into the long wet meadow grass, which felt much like stepping into a tepid foot-bath. "Well," said I, breathlessly, clasping my hands as if he was my God, and I was praying to him.

"Well, Miss Lestrangle, what?"

"Oh, you know what I mean, have you any news for me?"

"News! oh yes, lots; the funds have fallen to 84; and the Bishop of — is dead; and the eldest Miss Coxe is going to be married — to me — at least, so I heard this morning."

"If you asked me out here, only to make game of me, I may as well go home," I said; my not angelic temper succumbing under this process of aggravation.

"I ask you to come out this damp evening, and run the risk of catching a bad cold? I make game of you? God forbid!"

I turned away in mute indignation.

"What, you really are going? Well, I'm sorry for that. It's so jolly standing chatting here in this puddle; but it is rather a wet evening, isn't it? seasonable though, for the time of year."

I fumbled at the fastening of the gate, blind with rage. "Your wit, sir," said I, my voice trembling with passion, and drawing myself up with as much dignity as my limp old gown would admit of, "may be ap-



preciated by Mr., Mrs., and *Miss* Coxe, but it won't go down at Lestrangle. I wish you good evening."

"Good evening, Miss Lestrangle," said he, opening the gate for me to pass through, and baring his handsome head to the rain. "By-the-by, would you be so kind as to take charge of a small parcel which I believe belongs to you?"

He pulled a small roll of bank-notes from his pocket, as he spoke, and gave them to me. I hesitated. Should I throw them back with scorn into his teasing face, or should I gratify my intense curiosity to know how many there were of them? Curiosity prevailed, as I fancy it always has done, where women have been concerned, since the day when Eve was roused to inquisitiveness concerning that fruit which must have been a great deal more inviting to eye, and smell, and touch, than any apple that ever ripened, or she would not have run such tremendous risks for the sake of it. It was no Ribstone pippin, I feel assured, that served humanity that dirty turn, rather some juicy perfumed eastern pulp.

I unrolled the notes, with fingers rendered awkward by greedy haste, separated and smoothed out each one; pleasant were their crisp watered faces unto me. Will there be £10, £20; either sum would be a nice little sop for Cerberus. So I thought, and then I counted one, two, three, four, five. Five times ten are fifty. FIFTY POUNDS for that most despicable of old turnips, whose interior was, so to speak, a dead letter; one of whose hands was a mutilated stump, whose movements were so erratic that no man could calculate from hour to hour what its next freak would be, and which was unwieldy, unbeautiful, and everything that was undesirable. Now



and then, in these latter days, a strong qualm of doubt shoots through me, that never did that old warming-pan see the inside of Wardour Street, that that £50 came out of the not too well-lined pockets of poor open-hearted Dick M'Gregor. No such doubts had I at that time, to trouble my blissful young serenity; in those days I believed everything I heard, everything I was told, and almost everything I read. For a minute I stood, with drooped head, remorse driving small penknives through and through my heart; then I put out both hands, and said "O—h!" under my breath.

"Well, Miss Lestrangle, what have I done wrong now? Anything fresh? I'm not witty now, surely, am I?"

"Oh, don't, don't," I cry, whimperingly, and I cover my face with my left hand, and grope for my pocket-handkerchief with my right, while the shawl takes the opportunity of slipping off my head, down into an improvised pool among the buttercups; and there I stand, thin-clad, bare-headed, in the steadily pouring rain.

He picks up the shawl, and shakes it.

"Are you too hot, Miss Lestrangle? as you appear to be casting away your garments wholesale; if I might give an opinion, I should say that this was neither the time nor the place for taking a vapour bath."

I take away my shielding hand from my face, which I lift shy and burning towards his.

"Oh, please, don't mock at me any more. I *cannot* bear it; I thought you were only turning me into ridicule, and I — I — haven't a very good temper,



I'm afraid, and I — I — oh! if you only knew how I felt, I'm sure you'd leave me alone."

Whereupon I fell to weeping sore, for no particular cause. Oh, my Dick, my bonny, bonny sweetheart! how goodly you were then! are you goodlier now, I wonder, in that distant *Somewhere* where you are; or when we meet next, shall we be two bodiless spirits, sexless, passionless essences, passing each other without recognition in the fields of ether? God forbid that it should be so! oh, my King Olaf, as I called you first, in my girlish romance, and I cleave to the old name still. Oh, strong fair Norseman! did you rise from your warrior grave under the icy Northern waves, and come back among men only to shame the punyness of your descendants; and have you gone back thither again to your sleep beneath the green billows? there comes no voice out of the void to answer me.

\* \* \* \*

Tears played the good speed with Richard. In justice to myself, I must distinctly state that I was not aware of this fact, but was, on the contrary, grievously displeased with myself for having been beguiled into weeping. Had his grandmother, his maiden aunt, his laundress, or any old beggarwoman in the street cried at him, he would have been seriously disturbed at it. How much more then when a really good-looking young woman was making her nose and eyes of a flame colour in her anguish at his cruelty. The smile died out of his jocund young face as if it had been an exorcised demon; nothing could be more surprisedly, pitifully penitent, than the expression of his blue-gray eyes; he looked like a big dog that is very much



ashamed of himself for having been betrayed into bullying a little one. For a minute he was quite at a loss what to do; then he bethought himself of my shawl, which he wrapped round my shoulders, saying hurriedly, meanwhile:

"There! there! don't cry, don't cry! poor little girl! it was a shame to make her pretty blue eyes red, wasn't it? but I didn't mean to vex her, indeed I didn't. I'd cut off my right hand before I'd hurt a hair of her sweet head."

He had bandaged me up so tight in his eagerness, that I could hardly stir; I laughed through my tears."

"You've tied me up so tight that I cannot move my arms; I'm like a mummy."

He laughed too. "So I have, poor dear Nell! what an ill-used little girl she is!"

He bent over me to re-arrange my shawl, but when he had disposed its shabby old folds to his mind, he kept his arms about me. The rain dripped from his hat, and from his curly yellow hair, and Heaven's tears washed his bronzed cheeks; I looked up at him with shy rapture; at that brow "that looked like marble, and smelt like myrrh," at the honest, kindly, beautiful face; looked into his passionate eyes, and forgot the rain, and the long tangled grass, and my own mortifying silly behaviour, forgot everything in my new-found wonderful bliss.

"Am I teasing you now? shall I leave you alone, as you asked me just now? Must I? I will if you wish me; I should dislike extremely having to do it, but I will in a minute, if you tell me."

So he whispers, while his gold locks and my russet ones blend agreeably together. I had not the slightest



desire that he should leave me alone, but I said neither yea nor nay.

"Poor little pussy-cat, is she very anxious to get away? does not she like being kept a prisoner? won't she stay with me one little minute? she'd have to go far before she could find anyone that would love her better!"

For all answer, I lay my head on his breast, which the inclement weather has rendered rather a moist resting-place, and my cheeks put on their rouge, which the May showers vainly endeavour to wash off. He kisses me softly, and I forget to be scandalized.

"Do you know, Nell, I do really like you rather, joking apart."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I do; it's rather nice, don't you know? having a foolish sort of little girl to kiss and make love to, and tease now and then; I haven't near done teasing you yet, miss, if you think that."

I raise my head, and make a feint of going. "If that's the way you're going to treat me, I'd better leave you this minute."

"Do by all means, *if you can*; by Jove! how blue your eyes are, quite China blue, like tea cups!"

"What a pretty comparison!"

"I didn't say they were pretty; they're very big and babyish, and they pretend to be very innocent looking; but *pretty!* not exactly."

"I won't stay another minute."

"You're not going for two hours yet, good; and not then without paying toll; twenty kisses, and as many more as I'm good enough to accept."

I make no relevant answer to this shocking an-



nouncement. I only burrow my countenance into his drenched velveteen shoulder, and murmur to it "O — h."

"Are you pretty comfortable, Miss Lestrangle?"

"Yes."

"Nice growing weather, as I said just now, when you were in such an awful rage with me."

"Oh don't, *don't* remind me of it!"

"Yes, indeed, Miss Nell, you may well hide your face; that temper, unless checked in time, *may* (mind I don't say that it *will*, because our laws are so lenient, now-a-days), *may* bring you to the gallows."

"What! for murdering you?"

"Yes, for tearing my fine eyes out, or biting my nose off, or some such atrocity; oh, you darling; how have I managed to get on all these eight and twenty years without you?"

The warm rain pattered and plashed on our faces; the big white lilac bush bent above us its dripping leaves, and fair large flower-clusters brushed our cheeks, and gave out its strong pure scent freely to us.

"Heaven is crying pretty freely over our courtship, Nell," Dick says presently. "I hope it's not ominous."

"Hush! speak lower! I hear the gravel crunching!"

"Nonsense!"

"But I do, indeed. Sh! sh! sh!"

We listen; there is undeniably a faint noise, as of gravel ground beneath a yet distant heel.

"It's papa; he very often comes out after tea; but I thought the wet would keep him in to-night. If I



run very fast, I shall be out of sight before he gets round here; he has not got to the garden-house yet!"

"Da ——, I mean hang him; why could not he stay indoors till we come to fetch him?"

I laughed. "Good-night; let me go, quick!"

"Not unless you say 'good-night, darling.' I'll keep you else, till the governor comes round here, and then begin to talk very loud; by Jove! would not the old gentleman look alive? well, is it coming? 'good-night, darling,' or such a blowing up from Sir Adrian."

I made the required concession with less bashfulness than might have been expected of me, and then took to my heels, and reached my room, panting, dishevelled, crimson, but in safety.

## CHAPTER XI.

ANATHEMA MARANATHA be upon him, whether he be black or white, young or old, gentle or simple, philosopher or dunce, bond or free, who says we are not intended to be happy in this world! Can our God be of so refined a cruelty as to have created so many millions of human beings, just to worry their lives out? Can He have framed them into such an ingenious compound of matter and spirit? — can He have given them such vast capabilities of being glad and being sorry, merely that He may the better torment them? Can He have made us out of spite, as Caliban opines of his god Setebos, in Browning's fine poem? If He had done so, why did He make the period of our sufferings so short? why did He not make us eternal? then indeed (were He such a monster of *barbarity*, as



is pre-supposed by this hypothesis), might He have worthily wreaked his hatred upon us. Our religion, as Pascal remarks, is the only one that inculcates on its votaries not only awe and reverence, but love towards the Deity.

Could it reasonably ask us to give our hearts to a capricious, malignant demon, who had put us together, only that He might mangle us? Moreover, would not such a demon in all probability have got tired of his cruel game, having had so many hundred generations on which to practise it? Would not he probably be turning his devilish power of inflicting anguish into some new channel; testing it upon some other family of defenceless sufferers? To no demon's malice do we owe our creation; our God meant us to be boundlessly, flawlessly happy; *that* we never can be now, thanks to ourselves; but moderately, temperately, soberly happy we may still be, if we go the right way to work. Happy, partly in present fruition, far more in expectancy; happiest in the very fact which at the first blush has a sorry aspect — that all our happinesses here are but transitory, mere types and shadows of worthier substances, never to be grasped till this mortal has put on immortality!

Perfectly contented we never can be here. Kick as we may against the fiat which forbids it; struggle and strain as we may to attain that unattainable good; it is an impossibility, from the very constitution of our souls, which are ever unconsciously, involuntarily, looking onwards, onwards, from year to year, from hour to hour, from minute to minute.

“I shall be satisfied, but oh, not here!”



Fully satisfied on this earth can our spirits never be; they being of so high a nature; cast in so noble a mould that nothing less than God can fill them. Somebody, I forget who, remarks, on the rarity of hearing any one exclaim, "How happy I *am!*" "How happy I *was!*" and "How happy I shall be!" are frequent ejaculations, but to hear man, born of woman, felicitate himself on his present condition, is uncommon indeed. So it must ever be till the restless hungry soul be laid asleep in light.

My happiness that night was not temperate, moderate, sober; it was limitless, frenzied, drunken. The pace was too good to last, as I might have known, had I not been nineteen, and somewhat of a greenhorn, even for that immature age. I wonder I did not catch my death of cold, I'm sure. It never occurred to me, either to go to bed or take off my wet clothes. Hour after hour, I sat with drenched garments clinging close round me, with my dank thick hair streaming loose about my throat. I might have been Ophelia, barring the flowers and the insanity.

There I sat by the open casement window, with a box of mignonette under my nose; with my candle first flickering in its socket, and then departing this life with a grievous smell, and with the summer dawn broadening across the pearl-gray sky. I had fallen neck and crop into love; it had not taken a minute doing, but for all that, it was as thoroughly done as if I had been walking in deliberately and gingerly for the last dozen years. Quite unexpectedly, when I was neither looking for nor thinking of any such thing, I had found a most precious stone, a pearl of great price, and I must needs look at it on all sides, weigh it, and



consider gravely to what best profit I could put it. One thing was certain, to no one's lot could it ever have fallen to have discovered so big a pearl; others might have hit upon smaller ones of the same genus, but in size and colour mine must be, have been, and ever will be unique.

The rain had ceased, and one star stole from behind the soft dense cloud-curtain, and trembled and shook in the distant ether. I fixed my excited sleepless eyes upon it. Had that far world any inhabitants? any beings like ourselves? men and women? were there any red-haired girls and handsome fair men there? If so, could there be any one living there now experiencing felicity equal to mine? most unlikely. Had any one in *this* world ever been possessed of such perfect bliss? Was papa as happy when he brought mamma back first to the dear old house, in the days when they planted that Westeria that covered half the south wall now? Mamma in a sad coloured gown, with a waist under her arms, leg of mutton sleeves, and bob curls, which was the aspect under which my deceased parent always presented herself to my mind's eye, being the form under which she was represented in a miniature that had hung, ever since I could recollect anything, over against papa's chair in the library? I decided not.

Was Dolly anything like as happy, when she was engaged to that pink-eyed young man of immense property, who died of consumption a week before his intended wedding-day. I taxed my memory to recollect any ejaculations expressive of ecstasy given utterance to by my sister, when in the rapturous position of betrothed to that poor, three-quarter-witted young Croesus.



The nearest approach to anything tender that I could recall, as having proceeded from her, was "that he was not quite such a fool as he looked."

When he died, I remembered that she cried a little, and went into mourning, and said that she wished she had been his widow, poor dear fellow, for that widows' caps were so becoming, and she should have liked to have paid that tribute of respect to his dear memory.

"What should I do if Dick were to die?" said I aloud, leaning my elbow on the sill; and addressing my question indifferently to the star and the mignonette box. Fall down dead on the spot probably, fall on his dead body, and die kissing him.

"As Hero gave her trembling sighs to find  
Delicious death on wet Leander's lip."

To me it seemed, then, that to stand by and see Dick die, I living meanwhile, and surviving him, would be a physical impossibility. But if, by some miracle, I were to be unable thus to rid myself of life; if it were still to keep its undesired hated hold upon me, why — I'd take poison. Nothing could be simpler; arsenic, for instance, such as we set for the rats, and which made them swell to such a size, run so greedily to the spring to drink, and die there. "Should I swell so, and be so thirsty before I died?" I wondered. I hoped not. It was not a romantic thought, but it thrust itself in among its more sentimental brethren.

The pearl-gray sky turned red, then lilac, then rose, then azure. The sun came forth in his might, and the birds began talking volubly all at once, singing hymns, and pæans, and blythe good-morrows one after another. I rose from my seat, and began pacing up and down the room, with my hands locked together.



Why was I so happy? What had I done to deserve it? Why was God so good to me? Did He like me better than other people? Could it be that He chose favourites capriciously among his creatures? Had He so chosen me? or had He only given me this great boon to punish me more heavily by taking it away again? I fell on my knees, and begged and entreated God to visit me in any other way he should see fit; to send any loathsome agonizing sickness upon me; any form of suddenest, awfulest, cruelest death, but not to rob me of my yellow-haired lover. In what way this hallowed, chastened, pious prayer was granted, you, oh my unknown friends! shall see hereafter.

As I rose from my impromptu devotions, I inadvertently put my hand into my pocket and drew out the bank-notes which I had till that minute forgotten. I kissed each one separately, since Richard *might* have touched it, locked them all up in a drawer with my Sunday bonnet and my best Bible, and then at length, when other decent folks were getting up, I took off my clothes, laid down and slept profoundly, till roused by the entrance of Mary, the apple-cheeked, with my hot water.

That day was marked by two incidents, both black in hue; that day papa went away for a week's visit to an old chum, and that day Dolly returned. I think the two occurrences stood somewhat in relation of cause and effect to each other. I think that my father, with a cowardice unworthy of his age and station, fled at the approach of his lovely Dorothea. Dear old gentleman, I forgave him his desertion, because I sympathized so with the occasion of it. I poured out his tea for



him, packed up his clothes, and put sprigs of lavender among them to remind him sweetly of his old home and his little daughter, gave him my blessing, and sent him off.

"Good-by, dad," said I, hanging about his neck. "Don't catch cold, and don't leave any of your pocket-handkerchiefs behind you, and don't leave me very long to Dolly's tender mercies, and come back soon."

Dolly arrived shortly afterwards. From the upper regions I heard her advent — heard the wheels of her chariot, "low on the sand and loud on the stone," rolling to the door. I went down with laggard steps to receive her. The noon sun was beating on the hall door, making the iron knobs red hot; beating, too, on the aged and dilapidated Collins, who stood on the flagstone, with his ugly old head waggling like a mandarin's, partly from ague, partly in greeting to the returned Dorothea. The cab stood piled with luggage in the blinding glare, and the poor cab horse, with its lean head drooping, feebly tried to swish away the flies from its thin flanks with its tail. I stood in speechless, loveless admiration, as Dolly daintily descended, fresh and trim, as if she had been travelling in cotton wool and silver paper, in a bandbox, instead of in dusty railway and mouldy chaise.

"Well, Nell," said she, presenting her cool peach cheek to me, "how are you? Much the same as usual, I see — hair arranged with a pitchfork and dress with a view to ventilation."

I said nothing smart in reply to this fond greeting, because, as Johnson candidly avowed to the obsequious Bozzy, "I had nothing ready, sir." I followed Dolly



meekly into the house, taking great care not to tread on her train. She had addressed to me but half a dozen words. I had not been above five seconds in her company, and yet she had compelled me to descend to the old standing ground miles below her. In her absence, I felt myself to be a lovable, admirable, rational woman; once again in her presence, I returned to my old station of *gauche*, charmless, witless, school-girl.

## CHAPTER XII.

LUNCHEON over, we betook ourselves (the weather being too hot to go out) to the hall, and there prepared for an afternoon of coma. The blinds were pulled down

“On purpose to keep out the light,”

but stealthy arrows crept through, and lay along the faded blue and red patches of the Turkey carpet, and the dim worsted work of the straight-backed chairs. It was profoundly still; one could *hear* the silence, which was only broken by the buzzing of the flies, on the window-pane. Dolly had thrown herself — nay, not *thrown*, for that suggests an idea of violence never conveyed by Dolly's roughest movement — had sunk into a rocking-chair, and sat swaying gently to and fro.

Miss Lestrangle never read, and seldom spoke in the family circle; I think she thought it waste of time. She knitted now, mute as Andersen's poor pretty mermaid, and meditated on heavenly themes, to judge by her countenance. I sat on a bench by the long table in the window; a tall bench, whence my legs dangled



like gallows' birds, while my elbows rested on a big book, of which I read a page and a half. The book was Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," and it did not interest me in the least. I had selected it as being one of the biggest and most ponderous volumes in the library, as having likewise a ponderous title, promising to be good for edification; I, arguing, with faulty logic, that from so weighty a tome I must needs extract much weighty matter.

Truth to tell, I was deeply dissatisfied with myself, and with the weedy unstocked condition of my mind's fair garden. Dolly did well to despise me; I was but a poor creature, and despicable; foolish, childish, among women. I knew absolutely nothing; I had not the least idea what the Bill of Rights was about, nor who fought the battle of Fontenoy, or any other battle either. Dick would despise me too when he came to know me better; would get tired of me, and find me insipid. Whether a more accurate knowledge of dates would make me a more original companion, I did not stop to inquire. To remedy my deficiencies, I turned to Burton, and asked him to tell me something about something; tell me a few facts, was my cry, like the little turnip in Kingsley's "Water Babies."

"Knowledge is power," is a true aphorism, I suppose; but, after all, what is all human knowledge? The sum of our knowing is to leave a deeper, more hopeless conviction of our utter unknowingness. What a *chétif* scrap of a science is mastered by the greatest proficient in, the foremost pioneer of that science? How the ripened spirits of the departed wise, bathing in wisdom's clear fount above, must smile, looking down on the smatterings of learning, on the strength



of which we dub ourselves philosophers and pundits! Solomon, saith the Book of Kings, knew three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. Doubtless; and yet assuredly there must have been ten times three thousand proverbs that he knew not — a hundred thousand songs never sung by him.

In the morning of this our little life, we set forth on some one of the many paths that lead to knowledge's citadel. The way is steep, but we are resolute; it is hedged with briars, and encumbered with great stones; the briars scratch us, and we break our shins over the stones, but we struggle on with a good courage. Our road is becoming smooth; we shall reach the prize in time. Then Death lays his numb hands on our hearts, and we are still, and the path is closed to us for ever. Is it for ever, though? Is not the pitiful incompleteness of our labours here, the fragmentary character of our best efforts, strongest, most convincing proofs of our soul's undyingness? Shall we not trace out in a nobler sphere that same path we loved on earth? the *same*, only with the briars cut down, and the stones cleared away? Will not our poor crooked lives be rounded into Wisdom's perfect circle? Our Elysium is no occupationless, pleasureless *Nirwana* of swinish, plethoric repose; in our asphodel meadows we shall each of us have some mighty problem to work out, some godlike scheme to effect, and our brains will not tire, our eyes will not ache, and our hands not fail in the doing.

To what a distance have I strayed from myself, and my self-disgust? I have been up to heaven and down again. Burton's very detailed and minute ana-



lysis of the corporeal humours, which are melancholy's parents and grandparents, failed to enchain my attention. An idea struck me.

"Dolly," said I, and my sudden word cut the silence sharply.

"Well?"

"Do you know much, Dolly?"

"What do you mean?" measuredly came the words from her lips.

"I mean, do you know much about any sensible sort of things? Are you very well up in history and biography, and those sort of things?"

"Had not you better add 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses?' I suppose I am about as well informed as most other people."

Click, click, go her needles.

"Do you know enough to be able to teach me, I wonder?"

"Probably; my acquirements would be small else."

I pass by the sneer on the other side; it was but my ignorance's due.

"I wish you would give me lessons in something, Dolly; we used to learn German together once. Do you remember? Why cannot we begin again?"

"Thank you very much, but I'd infinitely rather be excused."

The long gray stocking grows under the swift white fingers; she ruffles her smooth brow in the agony of counting stitches.

"I'd do my best to get on; I'd do whatever you told me; I do feel my ignorance so oppressive, Dolly — quite a heavy burden."



"I'm extremely sorry to hear it, and I'm sure you'd make a delightful pupil, but I think, on the whole, I should prefer not. I don't want to qualify myself for a governess just yet, though I dare say that's what I shall have to come to."

I was baffled, and returned discouraged to my atrabilarious studies. Audible silence again for an hour or more; then the lower iron gate is heard creaking on its hinges, the gravel grating under approaching feet, and voices talking. Dolly is not above mundane curiosity; she rises and peeps softly round the curtain. "Mrs. Coxe," says she,

"But no livelier than the dame  
That whispered 'Asses' Ears' among the sedge,"

"and a *man*" (with slight animation), "good-looking too," (with interest), "*very*," (with symptoms of excitement), "who is he? do you happen to know, Nell?"

"No-o-o," I stutter, "I don't think so."

"You *do* know," says she, paling a little with anger, "and why you should think it worth while to lie about such a trifle I cannot conceive; if his name is ever such a mystery I don't doubt I shall fathom it without your help."

No more in that strain; the key changes to a "pathetic minor," for Collins entering announces "Mrs. Coxe and Major M'Gregor." Dolly's tongue was an instrument of great compass; it could play any tune from the Hundredth Psalm to "Wapping Old Stairs," and discourse excellent music. I did not, assuredly, expect my lover to kiss me, or take me in his arms then and there, but I felt a thrill of cold disappointment when I found him shaking hands with me in the same commonplace manner that Sir Hugh Lancaster or



Mr. Bowles the curate might have done. He was presented by Mrs. Coxe to Dolly, who smiled pensively, and cast down her eyes.

I made no attempt to entertain our guests, but clave to my tall bench, and my folio. I remember I read one inverted sentence over six times running, without a glimmering of its meaning penetrating to my brain. Dick came over presently, and looked over my shoulder.

"What light literature have you got there?"

I turn to the title-page and point gravely, Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy."

"H'm! cheerful kind of title! and is that Mr. Burton himself? Rum old party, isn't he?"

The curled Greek head stoops lower; the amber moustache touches my ear.

"Did you get home all right last night, Nell?"

"Yes."

"Did not catch a cold?"

"No."

"Nor get a blowing up?"

"No."

"That's all right; where's your father to-day?"

"Gone into Berkshire for a week."

"H'm! when the cat's away you know; and so that's Miss Dolly, is it?"

"Yes, isn't she lovely?"

Thus I ask, unknowing that never will man, come to years of discretion, be betrayed into the smallest commendation of one woman's beauty to another.

"Oh, I don't know; I haven't thought about it; I suppose I have been thinking too much of how lovely somebody else is."



"Who?" ask I, looking up with innocent inquiry; but somehow I read in the deep loving eyes who it is, and I begin to fiddle nervously with good Master Burton's yellowing leaves. Dolly's voice breaks upon my trance; it comes cooing softly across the hall.

"Nelly, dear, will you kindly run and get my portfolio of Bournemouth sketches; Mrs. Coxe is good enough to say she should like to see them; do go, there's a dear child! they are in the left top corner of my chiffonier; you cannot miss finding them."

I rise and go reluctant; I misdoubt me concerning Dolly and her sketches. They are not in the left top corner of the chiffonier, nor indeed in the chiffonier at all, and it takes me ten minutes diligent search to find them. When I return, the position of affairs is changed, which does not tend to the ameliorating of my temper. Dick is balancing himself on a three-legged stool within six inches of Dolly's knee, and she (her knitting dropped, her soul in her eyes) is gazing at him with mournful absorption, while he narrates some trivial incident of everyday life.

I move a small table in front of Mrs. Coxe, place the portfolio upon it, and retire to my distant corner, fully expecting my handsome Gilderoy to come and share my solitude. Whether he would have done so or not is a question now to be classed with such as "What would have been the course of English history had Queen Elizabeth married Philip of Spain? or had Richard Cromwell been the man his father was? or what would have been the fate of Norwich, if the man in the moon had not come down too soon?" Whatever Dick's intentions were, Dolly was too prompt for him.

"Oh, Mrs. Coxe," cried she, sinking on her knees,



in the prettiest attitude of despair, beside that lady, who, being short-sighted, was holding one of my sister's artistic efforts, within a quarter of an inch of her snub nose, *feeling* its beauties with that sensitive feature, "Oh, Mrs. Coxe, I could not possibly think of letting you examine my poor little daubs so critically; you'd find as many faults in them as there are stars in heaven. They ought to be looked at at the distance of half a mile at least; Major M'Gregor" (diffidently, with a slight tremor in her voice), "would it trouble you very much, or *could* you, *would* you be so very kind as to hold up this *one*, only *just* this *one*, at the proper distance, for Mrs. Coxe to see? There, oh thanks so much. Nothing could be better! Oh, *how* good you are!"

Poor Mrs. Coxe screws up her eyes, and peers, and succeeds in discerning a confused blotch of blue and green and yellow.

"H'm! h'm! yes! yes!" says she, knowing that say something she must. "What a fine bit of colouring! and how well you have managed that patch of light on the hill-side!"

"It isn't a patch of light, Mrs. Coxe — it's a white cow," says Dolly, sweetly, correcting her.

Mrs. Coxe has her back to me, but by the wobbling motion of her big blue feather, I see that she is discomfited. I grin a ghastly grin.

"It's a shame to detain you so long, Major M'Gregor, isn't it?" asks Dolly, speaking with some little effort, in her coyness, at having to address a stranger again. "Nelly is show-woman generally, and a very good one she is too, but somehow she seems a little knocked up with the heat or something to-day."



"I'm not the least knocked up," growl I, "brief and stern," as the skipper in the song.

"Aren't you, dear? I'm glad of that; I thought you were. You see, Major M'Gregor, you're the only gentleman to-day, and we think we have a right to make a sort of slave of you — don't we, Mrs. Coxe?" The soft fawn eyes seek his with timid deprecation, and then droop suddenly, and the velvet cheeks deepen in colour to the hue of a dog-rose's heart. Dick, of course, protests that if there is one employment he loves above another it is holding up water-colour sketches at arm's length for his hostess's inspection. If it is an irksome task to him, he disguises his tedium under it uncommonly well. I meanwhile bite my nails, my lips, the top of a pencil, and anything else I can lay my teeth on. There are about a hundred sketches, and on each one Mrs. Coxe has to make comments; some few as fortunate as the one I have recorded; some more, some less so. At length they come to an end, and our guests rise to depart. I take a sudden resolution; nobody shall hinder me; the bit is between my teeth. I would open the hall-door myself for our visitors.

"Nelly, dear," cooes my sister-cushat, "will you ring the bell for Collins to open the door?"

"No," said I, doughtily, "*I will not*; I'll open it myself."

Dick was looking at her, and she could not scowl prohibition at me; but I think she made a little memorandum of it. However, I gained my point; ran and opened the heavy door while Dolly remained in the inner room. Mrs. Coxe passed out first, and having



so passed was good-natured, and "never looked behind."

Dick loitered, and (Mrs. Coxe's extensive back being turned) took my face between his two broad hands.

"Bad luck, Nell! back luck!" he said, a little disappointedly, "not five words with you to-day!"

"No," said I, and my countenance was troubled, "nor you won't either, now Dolly has come home!"

"Dolly be hanged!" said he, irreverently. "We must pack her off pretty quick if she spoils our sport, must'n't we? but she won't, I'm sure; she looks good-natured; she'll help us."

I shook my head.

"Give me one kiss, pretty one, to take away with me; nobody's looking!"

Our lips met — met joyfully, clingingly; parted grudgingly.

"One more, Nell!"

"No, no, no! Mrs. Coxe will turn round."

"Mrs. Coxe will do nothing of the kind; Mrs. Coxe is a sensible woman, and minds her own business."

"Indeed, *indeed*, you ought to go and open the gate for her," I said, wrenching my countenance out of his hands.

"In a minute, in a minute! no hurry. Nell, you're looking rather pretty to-day, only your cheeks want pinching or doing something to, to put a little colour into them."

"They never have any colour; it would not look natural."

"Well, then, I suppose I must put up with them,



ugly as they are! Nell, where will you come and meet me to-night?"

My eyes clave to his face, and feasted on its beauty. I would have gone to meet him in a dungeon, in a charnel, in death's stronghold itself. The door to the hall opened softly, and he dropped my hand like a hot potato. Enter Dolly, not a whit discomposed by her position of Mar-Plot.

"I thought," she said, suavely, "that this might be your stick, and that you had forgotten it!"

So speaking, she held up a walking-stick for his inspection. It had been in papa's possession full twenty years, and she knew it.

"Oh, thanks, thanks; no, it isn't mine; I've got mine here. Well, I won't keep you out in the sun any longer — good morning!"

Thus he departed. My wrath surged and boiled like broth in a pot.

"You knew that stick wasn't his, Dolly?" quoth I, irefully.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Hein! if I did, what then? One little ruse is as good as another, isn't it? Your little ruse was the hall-door, mine was the walking-stick, that's all; quits, don't you see?"

I did not see, nor did I vouchsafe another word to Dorothea that evening.



## CHAPTER XIII.

"FOR lo! the winter is past; the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing birds is come; and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

It is not the fashion to quote canticles I am aware, but I cannot help that; it seems to me the exquisitest, joyfulest love song ever penned. It translates the spirit and essence of the spring into words. Spring out of doors, and spring in my heart, the turtle's voice was heard there too.

"This world is very lovely, oh my God,  
I thank thee that I live,"

say I, spontatively, descending suddenly from the "Song of Solomon," to that of Mr. Alexander Smith. I could spout tomes of verse to-day; I cannot amble peaceably along the high road of prose; it is too level, too dusty, I must go cantering up the green slopes of poetry. I am craning my long young neck out of the morning-room window, which is barred, and there is only just room for my head to get egress between the bars; but the May air imperatively demands to be sniffed — so with my nose aloft, I am sniffing 'bouquet de printemps,' an odour which if it could but be corked up in bottles and sold, would make the fortune of any rival of Piesse and Lubin instantaneously. "I thank thee that I live," repeat I piously, in recitative, while my round white chin rests on the knuckles of my two hands.

"Thank Him that you live!" says Dolly, from the table where she is turning over the pages of *Le Follet*,



"do you? well then I must say that you are thankful for small favours. Life in an old barrack with no present income, and no future prospects, hardly seems to me a theme for Hallelujahs; for weeping and gnashing of teeth rather."

"I would not gnash my teeth if I were you, Dolly!" say I, with sarcasm, which is a weapon I but seldom use, as it mostly cuts my own fingers, when I lay hold of it, "or you may break them, and that would seriously diminish your value in the market."

"Market, indeed!" echoes Dolly, interrupting herself in the perusal of a *toilette de promenade*. "This little pig does not go to market, and very sorry she is for it too; she might have all her teeth drawn and knocked out, or gnashed out, and nobody would be the wiser. Alas! alas! there are no pig dealers in this Sahara."

"Why on earth do you come back to this Sahara, that you are always sneering at? who asks you? who wants you?" inquire I, in a rage, withdrawing my head from between the bars, and grazing my ears.

"One must come home now and then," replies Dolly, quietly; *she* never gets into a rage; she thinks it *roturier*, "or else people would say that one had been turned out of doors for misconduct, or that one's papa was in gaol, or that one emanated from the Foundling, or something equally distressing."

"Thro' plea—sures and pal—a—ces tho—o—o I roam,  
Be it ev—er so hum—ble there's no—o place like home,"

warble I, lifting up my voice, being utterly unable to abstain from metre to-day.

"As for palaces," says Dolly, closing *Le Follet*, "they have not been much in my line; except the



Bishop's indeed, when we go to propagate the gospel, or the negroes, or something there; and as for pleasures, one has to forage for one's own little bit of amusement certainly; but I quite agree with you as to there being no place *like* home, not the least like; for utter destitution of paint, and decent cookery, and hot-water pipes, and all the appliances of modern civilization, this baronial residence is undoubtedly unique." Blasphemy, flat blasphemy wasn't it?

"*You*," say I, drawing myself up to my five foot six inches, and sputtering in my desire to get out my words fast enough, "*you* put paint, and *good eating*" (very scornfully), "and hot-water pipes above honour and glory, and Cressy and Agincourt and" — (my historical knowledge exhausts itself here), "and all that sort of thing; *I* don't!"

Dolly says, "Agincourt a fiddle!" a sentence, the construing of which will tax the acumen of the New Zealand commentator a couple of thousand years hence; to which remote period this immortal work will undoubtedly descend. "Agincourt a fiddle! does the knowledge that one lot of mouldy old men poked another mouldy old lot in the ribs with pikes four hundred years ago make me feel the draughts less, or you look less like a scarecrow?"

"By the tombs of my ancestors!" always seemed to me the weakest oath ever invented; "by the tail of my dog," or "by the whiskers of my cat," would be to me every bit as impressive and binding. "*You* are not everybody," reply I shortly, which, though not much to the point, was undeniably true.

"I wonder now," pursues Dolly, speculatively stretching out her arms lazily, and yawning — "dear!



how sleepy this weather makes one — I wonder now whether that mighty man of valour, what's-his-name, that was here yesterday, I wonder whether he has any forbears."

"Oh yes, lots," say I, hastily, whisking my face round for my sister's scrutiny, and then I reflect that I have spoken without authority, and that M'Gregor may be as innocent of a grandpapa as his friend Coxe, for all I know to the contrary.

"How do you know that?" asks Dolly, sceptically, "does he carry them about stuffed with him?"

I laugh explosively, "Not that I know of; no more do we, and yet we have them all the same, but — but M'Gregor is a good name you know, quite — quite historical."

"If you come to that, so is *Coxe*; there were Cocks that strutted out of the ark, and pecked and crowed on the top of Mount Ararat."

I lean my cheek, which is growing as red as the wattles of any cock that ever was hatched, against the cold iron window-bars to cool it, and say with diffidence, "But — but — Sir Walter Scott?"

"Oh ho!" says Dolly, drawing a deep inspiration, and shaping her pretty red mouth into the form for a whistle, from which unfeminine phonetic exercise she however refrained. "Oh ho! he's a Rob Roy, is he? a mighty freebooter? We must be looking after the cows and pigs, or he'll be making a raid upon them to prove his descent!"

"I don't *know* of course," say I modestly, "any more than you; I only thought" — grasping the friendly bar spasmodically, "such an uncommon name — so pretty —" mumbling off into unintelligibility.



"He cannot be anybody *much*," pursues Dolly disparagingly, taking up a pencil and beginning to scribble faces on a bit of paper, "or he would not be staying with the Coxes. The Coxes are working up, undeniably; as undeniably as we are working down, but they have not got up many rungs yet. I suppose they think that they will begin with decayed gentlemen, and hoist themselves up on their shoulders into the society of prosperous ones; rather sharp of them."

"Lord Frampton dines with the Coxes, and so does Sir Hugh Lancaster," cry I, eagerly; earnestly desiring that I had Richard's letters patent of nobility in my pocket to pull out, and fling in triumph on the table, under Dolly's unbelieving nose.

"Pooh!" says Dolly, demolishing my poor little plea, with one inflexion of her voice, "Sir Hugh is hail-fellow-well-met with every pettifogging little attorney in Nantford, and Lord Frampton remembers that Parliaments are septennial, and would dine with Old Nick, if he would give his second son a plumper, and besides, *dining* is a different thing; that god-like animal, man, is always governed by his stomach, don't you know that? And worthy *Calico's* Burgundy and made dishes are worth undergoing a little *infra dig*-ness for; but this man is evidently on quite an *ami de la maison* footing."

There is a minute or two of silence, during which Dolly goes on making spirited little fancy sketches, with a black nibbed pencil; she is so handy with her fingers — and I sit biting my nails like giant Pope, and cudgelling my small brains for some remark of Dick's tending to prove that he was not on terms of intimacy with the Coxes; that it was either business,



or good nature, or convenience that had brought, and now kept him there; with all my cudgelling this was all I could cudgel out.

"He thinks them vulgar himself, Dolly, I'm sure; he said one day, that Mrs. Coxe was too fond of the peerage."

"Did he?" replies Dolly, "how ill-bred of him! A man must be rather low before he will go and stay weeks in a tradesman's family, and be tame cat about his house; but he must be lower still to abuse his hosts behind their backs to a perfect stranger; that does not sound like *sang pur*."

"The King can do no wrong," the old Divine Right Tories used to say; "Major M'Gregor can do no right," appears to be my sister's version.

"It was not abusing her," cry I, hotly, "to say that she was fond of the peerage, any more than it would be abusing you to say you were fond of dress or society, or your own way, as you are; it was only stating a fact."

"I thought," says Miss Lestrangle, very calmly, "that you adduced that speech to prove that he was no great friend of the Coxes; if it was not intended for abuse it proves nothing."

The honeysuckles are thrusting themselves in so forwardly at the casement, sending their delicatest, divinest odour up my nostrils, which are inflated like Vivien's when Merlin called her ugly names, with "sharp breaths of anger." They are sad radicals those honeysuckles; they would do just as much for an old fish-wife, they are saying all they can in their refined smell language to soothe me, and reconcile me to the



humble *locus standi* of my lover. They are humble themselves; they twist their pale coronets to crown every hedge; they are flecked with the common summer dust, and plucked by little ragged children to stick in earthenware mugs in the dim cottage windows.

"Rob Roy is a new acquisition. He did not grace these wilds when last I was at home; he was still sporting among his native thistles, I suppose. Have you known him long?"

"Ye-es; at least — I suppose — not very long."

"How long?"

(How long, indeed! according to the almanack of the soul, a lifetime, longer than old Parr's, an *Æon*; according to the prosaic humdrum almanack of the pocket-books, about a week or ten days.)

"I think — about a fortnight," I answer, slowly. My head is turned away, but I feel with some sixth sense that Dolly has suspended her art-labours and is looking at me, but I flatter myself that with all her knowledge of physiognomy, she will be puzzled to extract much emotion from a washed-out brown holland back, and a huge loose knot of bronze hair.

"And where," continues Dolly, with a malicious little laugh, "may I ask, was the favoured spot where so much valour and so much beauty first met?"

'We first met at a ball, where our hands did entwine,  
And I did squeeze his hand and he did mine.'

Was that it?" Dignified silence on my part. "I wish, my good child, that you would be so kind as to turn your countenance round this way, and not act as if you had a face each side your head, like Janus."



I have been so much accustomed from my youth up to put in practice the injunctions of that ingenious quatrain,

"Go where you're told,  
Do what you're bid,  
Shut the door after you,  
Never be chid;"

(only that the last line is not true in my case, as I frequently am chid), that I comply.

"Where was it?"

"In the churchyard," in a very low, reluctant voice; it seems profaning the sanctity of that first blest interview to let in the garish day of Dolly's sneers upon it.

"What a cheerful rendezvous! Has old Iken's mantle, or rather spade, fallen upon Mr. M'Gregor; was the canny Scot turning an honest penny digging graves?"

"I wish he had been digging yours, and you were in it now," say I, but to myself. Moses was the meekest man upon earth, but it is my firm belief that he would have turned and rent either Aaron or Miriam, if they had attempted to badger him in the way my sister was badgering me.

"Was it on a Sunday?"

"No."

"What took you to the churchyard, then?"

"My legs."

"Ah! how humorous! and if it is not an impertinent question, who introduced Sandy — is his name Sandy — to his Nell?"

"Nobody."

"Ah, to be sure! No doubt a friend of the Coxes



would dispense with such preliminaries. I suppose in calico circles such checks upon the graceful freedom of social intercourse are voted superfluous."

My angry passions are rising like well-leavened bread; like a river after autumn rains; like quicksilver in fine weather.

"I suppose," says Dolly, leaning back her little snooded head among the sofa cushions, and surveying me from under the blue-veined marvel of her white lids, "I suppose that, like Artemus Ward and his Free Lover, you mutually ejaculated, 'You air my affinity,' and rushed into each other's arms."

The cup is full and brims over; the kettle has over-boiled; the river has risen level with its banks, and is pouring madly over them.

"No!" say I, jumping off the window-seat and stamping, "we did not; and if we had, we should not have asked your leave. You may rush into the arms of any man or devil in England, and the sooner the better! God knows I would not stop you. I'd push you on, though I should pity Satan himself if he got you, so stop your sneers at people whose shoe-strings you are not worthy to tie!"

I had vague Scriptural ideas running in my head, you know, or I should have remembered that Dick was not in the habit of wearing shoes, and "whose shooting-boots you are not worthy to unlace," would not have sounded half so withering. Dolly unbuttons her languid eyes, that look out of place anywhere but in a Seraglio, about the hundredth part of an inch. Being "threeped at," as the servants call it, is for her a new sensation.

"That'll do," she says, coldly, "it's too hot for



towrows. Stamp a little harder on these worm-eaten old boards, and you'll find yourself in the cellar, reclining in one of the empty wine-bins."

The tornado of my wrath is moderating to a stiffish breeze, as, after having wrecked half-a-dozen vessels, and dismasted half-a-hundred, an equinoxial gale is content to fret and bluster itself into comparative peace; but in both cases the sea still seethes and works like must.

"I really thought," continues Dolly, gravely, having laid aside her mocking tone, "I really thought, Nell, that you could take a joke better; for you could hardly suppose that I meant *really* that a Lestrangle would submit to any familiarity from a Coxian *protégé*. No, no; we do not hold our heads so high in the world as we did, but it will take two generations more to bring us down to *that* depth; that would be fulfilling the prophecy, 'they that were clad in scarlet embrace dunghills,' with a vengeance."

I hardly relish this bold trope, being moreover guiltily conscious of having fulfilled the prophecy, and embraced the dunghill.

"No! no!" fanning herself gently, with the advertisement sheet of the *Times*; "everything after its kind; like and like; *Cocks* and Hens, and Lestranges, and gentlemen; probably, from the docile way in which that man trots about at Mrs. Coxe's apron-strings, and fetches and carries for her, he must be engaged to Amaryllis; they are going to try and mix a little poor blue blood, if it *is* blue, which is open to question, with their own full-bodied red."

"He would not touch Amaryllis with a pair of



tongs," cry I, digging my nails deep into my pink palms, and making them pinker still.

"H-m," with a cynical motion of the shoulders, "hungry dogs eat dirty pudding, and Amaryllis' *dot* would go far towards re-stocking the kail yard that I suppose he has somewhere in Auld Reekie."

"You see further into a millstone than most people, that's evident," I say, derisively.

"No, I don't; I only see what's under my nose, and heaven forbid my setting up as a matchmaker, the vulgarest amusement a vacant mind can have; but, somehow, the world's pulse does not seem to beat in this remote corner; one has so little to think about that one is reduced to silly gossipy speculations about one's neighbour's concerns."

"I'd speculate something a little more probable while I was about it," is my indignant comment, and being unable to trust myself either to say, or refrain from saying more, I move towards the tall sombre door, and pass through it into the dim wide hall.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

I DON'T think I like the word *Nature*, it sounds hard and dry and unfriendly; a chilly abstraction instead of the homely familiar assemblage of green fields and hedges and muddy lanes, and cows and donkeys, and rivers that it is intended to represent. However, I suppose until our language grows richer by a more satisfactory term, I must be content to make use of it. Dear mother Nature, after all is said and done, is far pleasanter than most specimens of Human Nature. She



has been bespattered with a great deal of ill-fitting praise and undeserved abuse, for not sympathizing sufficiently with the howlings and throes and yearnings of aspiring and dyspeptic bards, for not howling and yearning with them, but after all she is quite sympathetic enough. She does not indeed disfigure her pretty face with crying for us when we die, why should she? She will die herself some day, she knows; but when our own kind cast us out, she takes us to her motherly breast, and wraps her fresh, sweet-smelling earth-cloak about us. And then, while we are yet alive, what a friendly companion she is! not too demonstrative, and such a good listener; lets us say what we please, never contradicts us, nor gives us bits of advice, or pieces of her mind.

I pick up my hat (it cost seven pence half-penny originally, and has been in wear three summers) from off the settle, and pass through the swing door and the offices to the kitchen, with the raftered ceiling and huge broad fire-place. A very thin curl of blue smoke is going up its wide throat now; we need but little fire to do our minute portion of cooking. Times are changed since oxen were roasted whole, and old October brewed at Lestrangle. When the last Lestrangle came of age, I don't think even a chicken was roasted whole in honour of the event; well! we shall be extinct next generation, and time for us!

"The old order changeth; giving place to new,  
And God fulfils himself in many ways."

Mrs. Smith is sitting in one sunny window, a little orange tree in a pot that she has raised from a pip stands on the sill; it has shot up very tall and drawn from the heat of the kitchen. Mrs. Smith is shredding



beans into a willow pattern dish. Coming events cast their shadows before, and we are evidently going to have beans and bacon for luncheon. Beans cost nothing, and bacon not much, so they are a very favourite and frequently recurring *mets* in our bills of fare. I stand by her for a minute or two in silence; so, finding that, like a ghost, I require to be spoken to first, she lifts up her kind homely face, and says:

"I'm afraid you're a bit lonesome to-day, my dear, your pa gone and all; I 'ope 'e's got all right to his journey's hend; I don't put much faith in them ould trains, and Miss Dolly is not much company for you, is she?"

"No," say I, taking up one of the empty pods, and looking at the short white down upon it; "but I don't want company," and then I leave her with the warm sun streaming in on her little sickly orange tree, with its dusty dark leaves, on her black net cap and faded purple ribbons, and on her pale smooth beans. I pass through the house-yard, where a scullion "fat and foolish" as the one that was scouring a fish-kettle at Shandy Hall when the news of Master Bobby's death arrived, is pumping into a bucket, with her great red arms, and where the old tom-cat is couching on the top of the wall, with his tail curled round his toes, one eye shut, and the other keeping wily watch upon the movements of a very young, naked, and clumsy bird on the beech bough above him.

There was a little book came out some years ago, which I believe had a great run among the spinsters of Britain, entitled "Work: Plenty to do, and How to do It," and with an emblematic beehive blazing on its small blue back. I had no work to do, and should



not have done it if I had. How would the ingenious author have dealt with me? The gate into the ten acres stands open, and I enter. Our hay is not cut yet, it will be a month yet before the grass and the flowers' sweet death make all the land one nosegay; a month before, from my bedroom window in the early morning, I see the long row of haymakers bending to their scythes; before I see their ladies wearying their strong horn-hands with tossing the hay in the warm dry air, and raking it together with their big blunt-toothed rakes through the long summer days.

I made hay houses up to a very very few years ago, went on making them until my commanding height and Dolly's ridicule compelled me to relinquish my unseemly sport; even now, though I have been to a dinner party, and set up a lover, my soul hankers after the forbidden fruit.

Regardless of the injury I am doing to the crop, I throw myself down full length, shaded by a sycamore, which ought not to be in the hedgerow and is. The grasses are so very tall, they stand up inches above my prostrate form; I can see the little summer flies walking up the stalks of the ladies' smocks, and into the faint sweet flowers.

I clasp my hands at the back of my head and lie very still, so still that a little blue butterfly settles on my breast, and opens and closes its white-lined wings slowly in the sun; and green dragon flies go whirring confidently past, almost brushing my nose as they sail gauzily by. There is a path through this field, a right of way; in litigation about which my worthy grand-papa, whose money always burnt a hole in his pocket, spent hundreds fifty years ago, but very few people



ever pass along it. Nobody is passing along it now: this midday is as utterly mute as any midnight.

From my low bed I look straight into the sycamore; I see the coy little shadows playing hide and seek; see wonderful quivering lights; see the leaves in all the bravery of their new attire — some have put it on but this morning, and here and there Heaven's blue eyes looking through the green windows. The yellow light and the staring up make my eyes ache at last, so I turn them away and look through the grass forest round me, through "the oat grass and the sword grass" off far away to the horizon. I always fancy that the bridge at the World's End, at which the youngest of the three prince brothers in the fairy tale invariably arrives, must be somewhere over there.

A very busy bee mistakes my right eye for a flower, and attempts to go into it; complimentary but not pleasant; to prevent the recurrence of such mistakes I close both eyes. When any one in a moderately comfortable position of body, and with any sin less than murder on his soul, takes to closing his or her eyes on a drowsy windless May day like this, there can be but one result; the result accomplishes itself in my case, and I fall asleep. Heaven knows what I dream about, some ridiculous *pot pourri* of impossibilities; but all of a sudden I jump half out of my skin, and start up. A man stands beside me; not Dick nor Sir Hugh, for what should they be doing trespassing in our ten acres? but

"A little glassy-headed hairless man,"  
Collins, in fact, in that striped linen jacket and generally *dégagé* costume in which he usually blooms through the forenoon.



"*How* you startled me!"

"If you please, ma'am," (for Collins, though of indisputable antiquity and not in the best repair, has sufficient remnant of good feeling and resemblance to a decent servant not to say "if you please, *Miss*,") "if you please, ma'am, there's a genelman in the libery, and Miss Lestrangle sent me to look for you to come to him."

"A gentleman!" I cry, with as much animation as if I were a second Miranda, whose acquaintance with gentlemen was confined to her papa and Caliban, "and Miss Lestrangle sent for me?"

"Yes, 'm; told me to 'unt heverywhere for you."

(Dick, of course, I say to myself. Well done, Dolly, your bark is worse than your bite).

"And what is the name of the gentleman?" to make assurance doubly sure.

"Well 'm, I were hout when he come, so *Hann* went to the door, and she says she could not take her hoath, but if she was to die next minute she should say it was Sir Hugh Lankyster."

"Sir Hugh Lancaster!" with infinite disgust, "then why on earth did you not say so before?"

I throw myself down again in a pet.

"You may go; I shan't come."

"But if you please, 'm, Miss Lestrangle ——"

"What do I care for Miss Lestrangle! Say that you could not find me."

Collins retires, discomfited, and as the last glimpse of his bald head and round shoulders disappear round the corner, I change my mind; chiefly, I think, because I see that there is no one to try and do it for me. "Half a loaf is better than no bread," and a



man, even though he be not *the* man, is better than nothing. Cleopatra was but true to the instincts of her sex when she said,

"I have no men to govern in this wood,  
That makes my only woe."

I effect a compromise with my dignity, by walking as slowly as I possibly can to the house, and entering the library with an air of ostentatious indifference.

"Here you are! That's all right," says Sir Hugh, jumping up, and in that jolly tone which is peculiar to him.

"Jolly" is Sir Hugh's own epithet, as "venerable" is Bede's, and "pious" Eneas's. Other people may be, and no doubt are jolly, venerable, and pious, though perhaps not all three at once; but these three men are the representatives, *par excellence*, of these qualities. Hugh reminds one somehow of the tone of Dickens' books; there is a broad, healthy geniality about him; he is like a wood fire on a frosty day.

"Did Collins find you?" asks Dolly.

I say, surlily, "Evidently, or I should not be here."

Dolly never wrangles in public; she remembers to *laver* her *linge sale* at home, and not give her acquaintance the benefit of it.

"Where were you?"

"In the Ten Acres. I was asleep, and he woke me, and gave me *such* a start." (pouting).

"Taking a siesta, were you?" says Hugh; "best thing to be done to-day; melting, isn't it? My bailiff who is very weather wise, says we are to have thunder before many days are over."



"I'm sure I hope so," Dolly says, languidly, "for it would cool the air, and prevent our all being reduced to little spots of grease."

"I'm sure I hope not," growl I, contradictiously.

"Why?" asks Hugh, who, I suppose, thinks that I most resemble the rooks who say nothing without cause (caws).

"Because it frightens me out of my wits. It is not a pleasant idea that you may be alive and well one minute, and as black as a coal and as dead as a door-nail the next."

Sir Hugh shows all his front teeth — and they really are his own, I do believe, his own by right of birth and not of purchase — in a laugh; he is as easily moved to mirth as a child at a pantomime.

"It doesn't sound very cheerful, certainly, when you put it so forcibly; but it is such an infinitesimal chance — a million to one. You don't mean to say that you do really funk — that you are really frightened I mean, at thunder? I should have thought that you were afraid of nothing."

"I am, though. I always tie something over my eyes, and go down into the cellar. Don't I, Dolly?"

"I can't say that you are remarkable for *physical* courage," replies Dolly, with a slight emphasis on the word; "but it's an unnecessary quality in a woman, only makes Jaels, and Judiths, and Madame Rolands of them, doesn't it, Sir Hugh?"

Sir Hugh says "he supposes so," and the electric topic seems exhausted.

Dolly and I are sitting on the sofa, side by side.

"My dear child," says the former — in that maternal, elder sister, guardian angel strain which



makes casual old lady-callers remark that "Miss Le-strange is like a mother to her younger sister" — "what have you been doing with yourself? You are covered with bits of grass, and sticks and stones enough to make a rook's nest. She is a regular Madge Wild-fire, isn't she?"

Sir Hugh thinks it would be rude to me to agree with Dolly, and rude to her to disagree with her; so he holds his tongue and looks wise, as if he could say a great deal, but would not. The window is exactly opposite, and Dolly is looking out of it. Suddenly she rises and walks quickly, but without ungraceful hurry, over to it.

"Don't you think it would be pleasanter to have this blind down a bit? The sun does beat so very powerfully on this side of the house in the forenoon;" and, without waiting to collect our suffrages on the subject, she pulls it down. "Do you know, Nelly, poor Sir Hugh has had such a disappointment this morning. He came over to have a talk with papa about those dwarf espaliers. You won't mind trying to be a bad substitute, will you, and taking him to see them?"

"Why can't you go yourself?" ask I, not too civilly.

"I," (with a laugh and a shrug). "What do I know about dwarf espaliers? I'm a regular cockney in all gardening matters."

"Never mind, it will do just as well any other day. I don't want to bore Miss Eleanor," says Sir Hugh, good-naturedly, but looking rather vexed, for he is a great and zealous gardener, and no one likes to feel themselves shirked.



I recollect myself, and call to mind how sharply my father took me up for snubbing Sir Hugh the other day.

"Oh, no; I don't mind much," I say, ungraciously enough. "Come along."

"Go through the garden door, it is open," says Dolly, following us out to see that we take her advice.

"You had better come too, Dolly," I say.

Hugh does not back my invitation.

"No, no," (with a sweet benedictory smile, which seems to say, like the 'heavy father' in the fifth act of a melodrama, 'Bless you, my children'). "Two are company and three are none; and, besides, the sun makes my head ache."

"How much better your rhododendrons do than ours," says Sir Hugh, stopping as we pass a great sloping bank of lilac blossoms; "can't make it out."

"We got plenty of bog earth for them from Brinley Heath," I say, looking down at my boots, and wondering whether my companion has yet discovered the yawning rift in the side of the left one.

"I see your father has let the land up to the very windows."

"Yes, he had to," I say, with a sigh; somehow, I don't much mind Hugh knowing our poverty.

We walk on silently for a minute or two. I think that Hugh is wishing it was not an insult for a rich gentleman to offer a poor gentleman money.

"What a jolly old place it is! I wish I could pick it up, and pop it down half a score miles nearer Wentworth."

"Do you?" in rather a dissentient tone.



"Yes, I do. Why, you see my mother is getting into years. It's a long way for her to come pounding over here. She is not so active as she was once, and I want you and her to know each other better."

Me *and Lady Lancaster!* why, on earth? I should not have been more astonished had he expressed a wish to see me and the Duchess of Cambridge on terms of intimacy; (*bien obligé*, but I think that that cast iron old lady would hardly be a meet playfellow for me.) Hugh looks straight before him; I think he thinks me inconveniently innocent.

"I wish you'd let us put you and your sister up at Wentworth, while Sir Adrian is away; you think my mother rather alarming, don't you; and she does cut up rough now and then, certainly, but what old woman doesn't?"

"I suppose they mostly are rather cross," I say, sedately, "and old men too!" I add, from a feeling of equity to my own sex.

"If you do come, you must come soon," continues Hugh, as we tramp together over the daisies that flourish unspudded upon our sward, "for in a fortnight or three weeks the old lady is off to town!"

"Are you going with her?"

"Oh yes, of course; though there's nothing in life I hate so much. Swelling about St. James' Street, in one's go-to-meeting clothes, and being squashed as flat as a pancake on some old dowager's stairs, aren't much in my line; I'd a deal sooner be sowing mangolds, or planting potatoes; beastly hole, London!"

Sir Hugh is bucolic, you see; he has not Pope's admiration of "the town."

"Dear me, how odd!" exclaim I, with genuine sur-



prise; my views of the metropolis are formed on the Whittingtonian and streets-paved-with-gold plan. "I should like to go to London of all things; I want to see the Tower, and the British Museum, and the Wax Works."

Sir Hugh bursts out laughing.

"God bless my soul! what an extraordinary notion; you'd hardly find it pay, I think, travelling a hundred and twenty miles to see Rush and Palmer and Townley, staring at you like stuck pigs."

I never have any great opinion of my own sapience, but I perceive that in my last observation I have considerably exceeded my usual standard of silliness, and so I am relieved at finding that we have reached our goal, the *potager*. Having called our old gardener, who is involuntarily practising the virtue of temperance over a hunk of cheese and an onion, to my assistance, I stand by for about ten minutes, and listen, not without amusement, to Sir Hugh and him mangling the French words with their clumsy British tongues, while I entertain myself consuming infantine peas. I have embarked on my seventeenth pod, and the others are deep in *Bons Chrétiens* and *Beurrés d'Alemberg*, when the sound of footsteps and voices in a duet, approaching, make me turn my head. Hugh does ditto.

"Hallo! here's your sister come out, after all! And who on earth has she got hold of? a good many yards of him anyhow! Why it's M'Gregor, as I'm alive! I did not know that you knew him." Dolly is holding up a little gray parasol, and has tied a small *fichu* over her head; she has a white gown on, and her modest eyes are cast down; altogether one would say that she



was about to be confirmed. M'Gregor comes *mowing* along beside her; rarely, rarely can a plunger walk.

"Why, M'Gregor, my dear fellow, how are you? I thought you had mizzled from these parts a week ago; why have not you been to look us up?"

Major M'Gregor takes his hat off to me; I am in disgrace apparently; not good enough to be shaken hands with.

"I did say something to Coxe about it, but he did not seem to care about lending me a nag, and I'm not particularly partial to pedestrian exercise in the dog days."

"You are amongst the poultry still?"

"Yes."

"Anything up there? calicoes lively?" asks Hugh with delicate *persiflage*.

"Bless your heart, my good fellow, the army's nowhere, they won't look at a soldier! Bulls are the only admirers of scarlet cloth now-a-days!"

Hugh turns to take a last fond look at the pear trees.

"What a sun-trap this garden is!" says Dolly; her *fichu* is not a very efficient turban, and she has a righteous horror of freckles; "let us go home again now that we have found you, you were so long over your gardening that we thought we must come to see what you were about, though we were not quite sure of our reception, were we?"

"This sort of thing," says Dick, laconically, pointing to a gooseberry bush beside him.

"Exactly, very graphically put." I am too indignant to deny.

"What's very graphically put?" asks Hugh, re-



joining me at this moment, but nobody answers him, and we all walk back to the house; *ego et rex meus*, or Hugh and I ahead, and the others following at a little distance.

Sir Hugh's mare, bright bay with white stockings, is being walked up and down the gravelled sweep by Collins, for stablemen have we never a one.

"Poor old girl!" says Hugh, going up and patting her sleek flank, "you're not so young as you were, but no more is your master if it comes to that; but you are as handsome as paint, isn't she?"

"*He* has a very thin tail," say I, and from this remark the amount of my knowledge of horseflesh may be inferred.

The others come up by-and-by, and Dolly exclaims, "Oh, Sir Hugh, you'll stay luncheon, won't you? It's very shabby of you running away from us in such a hurry."

I stand aghast, with my mouth open, fly-catching.

"No, thanks, no," replies Hugh, rather hastily. He remembers the shin of mutton, and does not agree with the proverb that "the nearer the bone the sweeter the flesh." "I never touch luncheon, at least not once in a month; spoils one's dinner. Good-by, Miss Lestrangle; good-by, Miss Eleanor; see you again soon," (how cheering!) "good-by, M'Gregor, give us a call, old boy, some day, when you are short of a job."

Off he rides, and we three stand looking after him, admiring the set of his coat behind and his mare's rat-tail.



## CHAPTER XV.

PROVIDENCE makes use of humble instruments sometimes to fulfil its behests, to prove which many good little books and *leaflets* (as Spurgeon and Co. have christened very young tracts) are written and printed. Providence makes use of Collins now in my favour, for as Sir Hugh and his war-horse — she is an old charger — vanish through the upper gate, he mysteriously summons Dolly to receive his confidence on some momentous theme. It was to tell her (as I heard later) that we were out of beer — we mostly were out of most things somehow — and that she may not be led away into offering Major M'Gregor any. *Manent* my follower and I.

"It seems one down t'other come on, with you, Nell," the former says rather bitterly.

"Don't talk about what you don't understand," I say saucily, my spirits rising like an india-rubber ball; "when people come to call upon a person, the person must be civil to them, mustn't she? *You* come into the garden without being asked, but *other people* aren't so forward."

Dick laughs, but not very satisfiedly.

"Don't remind me of my delinquencies; if I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget your father's face that day. It said 'trespassers shall be prosecuted' as plain as it could speak, didn't it? Well, have you anything particular to do this evening?"

"Have I ever anything to do?"

"Come and meet me then by the brook, by those alders, below the mill, will you?"



We are standing close together, and he lays his hand on my shoulder, in his eagerness, to the amusement of Mary, the housemaid, who, like Jezabel, is "tiring her head" at an upper window. I have not sufficient guile to try and enhance the value of my consent by hesitation, so I say, "Oh yes, how nice; what time?"

"Well, we dine at seven to-day instead of eight; Coxe is going up to town by the night mail, so I can get away a bit earlier; but I'm afraid it won't be much before half-past eight, that's very late, isn't it? But you know it is daylight till ten now, and then there's the moon."

If there were neither sun, nor moon, nor planet, and only one tallow candle to illuminate our interview, it would not make much difference to me.

"Half-past eight then?"

Dick has only time to execute a nod, pregnant with meaning as Lord Burleigh's, when Dolly reappears.

"I won't ask you to luncheon, Major M'Gregor, as I know it's no use," says Dolly.

How did she know it? There must have been a little confusion of ideas in her mind, I think. She knew it was useless to offer him any beer, because there was none, and I suppose that was what she meant. Dick feels himself dismissed. He has not the *tabouret*, or right of sitting on a stool in Queen Dorothea's presence.

"Why, I rather agree with Lancaster, that it spoils one's dinner; and at Coxe's, dinner's no joke, I can tell you; it requires the powers of an alderman, and would tax even them. Poor Coxe! He means well,



and I suppose it is old-fashioned hospitality, but it is rather trying. Good morning."

He fires off a look of intelligence at me, which seems to say, "Remember," as plainly as King Charles the First of blessed memory did to Bishop Juxon. I return it by a minute but knowing nod. I feel rather important, and a little dissipated, with the consciousness of a secret assignation on my mind.

"What was it you and Sandy were laying your heads together about, just now? You appear to 'love greetings in the Market Place.' Collins must have been edified," says Dolly, would-be playfully, but I detect the "clawses at the end of her pawses."

"He was telling me about his passion for Amaryllis, to be sure," reply I, with charming archness; "asking my advice as to Gretna Green and a post-chaise."

"Nonsense! What was it?"

"Brekkekekex! Koax! Koax!" I answer, quoting Aristophanes, though without knowing it; and Dolly, finding that a servile war has broken out, and that I am in a state of open insurrection, desists.

I was sadly in want of some one to confide in that day. What is the good of possessing the consciousness of being about to do something as exciting, and daring, and *hors de règle* as walking down the Burlington by oneself of an afternoon, unless you have some one to share that proud consciousness with you? What is Tilburina, stark mad in white satin, without her confidant, also stark mad in white linen? I should certainly have unbosomed myself to Mrs. Smith, the recipient of all my confidences, from my aversion for Dolly and Mr. Bowles, to my grief for the death of the little black duck that the rats ate, had it not been that the bread



not having "*rose*" (arbitrary past participle of the verb to rise), she was not in the best of humours, and paid small heed to me, when I threw out two or three remarks of an introductory nature as feelers. So I had to content myself with warbling:

"Come into the garden, Maud,"

all over the house, and wondering whether the household did not guess at the personal application of the song. Once and again a qualm of conscience broke off my singing, as I thought of my father. If he were displeased with me for sitting with a young man in our own garden, at *seven* o'clock in the evening (for I really don't believe it was later), would not he, *a fortiori*, be far more displeased with me for sitting with the same young man, at a spot, a quarter of a mile beyond our grounds, at nine o'clock.

My father's notions of propriety were rigidity itself. A woman's virtue in his code of *les convenances*, should be a stiff vestment of buckram and whalebone; he would have liked his daughters' modesty to be inferior only to that of the young lady in "Mr. Midshipman Easy," who affirmed, that to shake hands with a man made a cold shudder run down her back. Shall I not go, then? Stay at home, and mend stockings, and listen to Dolly "damning" her friends "with faint praise," and regaling me with Rochefoucauld and water. What! and leave poor Dick to kick his heels in the damp grass in dress boots? No, no; if it is a sin to disobey a parent, it is also a sin to break one's word, and when one must commit one of two sins, one may as well choose the pleasantest.

All the same, you will understand, please, that I



liked my father a hundred times better than Dick, and always should. I was not, I think, one of those fiery females, whose passions beat their affections out of the field. And really I don't think that Englishwomen are given to flaming, and burning, and melting, and being generally combustible on ordinary occasions, as we are led by one or two novelists to suppose. Foggy England is not peopled with Sapphos.

My thoughts having once travelled to my dad, stayed with him for ever so long. Had he lost any of his pocket-handkerchiefs yet? six of them were not marked. Had he remembered his gout, and abstained from port wine? exchanging the *cuisine* of Lestrangle for that of any other house, was, to a human creature, what being turned into a field of deep clover, after having been regaling on half a dozen bents is to a cow. Is he having a little rest from his burdens, a little time to gather up strength, and fortitude, and endurance? He had told us not to forward his letters to him, and indeed when I looked at their big blue envelopes and the character of their superscriptions, I did not wonder at his not being in any hurry for a better acquaintance with them. I determine to write to him; I don't write a letter once a quarter, so it is a work of some labour.

“Darling Dad,

“It seems such a long time since you went, I can hardly believe that it was only yesterday; I hope you'll come back soon, at least I mean I hope you won't if you find it pleasant where you are. I hope they make a great fuss with you; not so much as I do, I'm sure! Dolly is come back. She looks very well, and has



got a whole heap of new clothes; she is about as pleasant as usual. Sir Hugh Lancaster was here this morning, he came over to talk to you about the dwarf espaliers. (I had to look in the Dictionary to see how *espaliers* spelt itself.) He seemed quite disappointed to find you out, and pronounced the French names almost as badly as you do. Major M'Gregor, the man you did not like, was here too. The cob is very well, and so are all the fowls, except the hen with the top-knot, which has broken her leg tumbling down the ash-hole. I don't think I have anything more to tell you, except that I send you twenty kisses and a great deal of love, and that

"I am always,

"Your most loving NELL."

Tea in the kitchen at Lestrangle seems a jovial meal; at least to judge from the peals of laughter that even through the double doors reached our ears now and then. I believe that Collins is humour itself, in unofficial hours, and *Hann* of great worth in repartee. Tea in the dining-room is a silent feast; Dolly is buried in thought, and makes only one remark.

"I think you said that Sir Hugh was at luncheon here the day before yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yes."

The house seems to fall asleep after tea; as fast as the palace of the sleeping beauty.

"Not a sound,

Not even of a gnat that sung;"

nor could the slumbers of the sleeping beauty herself



be sounder than Dolly's as I peep at her through the library door as,

"She lieth on her couch alone."

As the time for my dereliction of duty draws near, I "wash and anoint myself, and change my raiment," or rather, as the fashion of oiling oneself like a machine is not prevalent in these Western regions, I confine myself to the other two. Then I steal through the garden door, and fly through the pleasure grounds, with as much velocity as if I had been projected from a cannon's mouth; *ventre à terre* I go, till I reach the fir wood. Not a breath of air! Every wind from Bo-reas to Zephyr is asleep in its cave, like bears in winter; and yet — how they manage it I don't know — there is the same little gentle sighing in the fir tops that there always is; they must do it themselves without the wind, it must be their "song of love and longing," like Shawondasee's to the dandelion in "Hiawatha."

As I cross the threshold of Nature's solemn little pine temple, I drop into a respectful walk, as men take off their hats when they enter a church. On emerging from the wood, coming out of church, I see cavalry in the distance. Courage! I'm not first at the trysting place to-day. I perceive the cavalry before it perceives me, as it is manœuvring among the alders. Is not it humorous of me calling my lover *it*; as humorous as Mr. Peter Magnus signing himself "*After-noon.*"

I come tripping bashfully over the buttercups and the meadow sweet, which are washing their faces before going to bed, and are so obliging as to wash my ankles too.



"I was afraid Sir Hugh had come to see some more pear trees," says Dick, with a smile, and drawing a breath of relief as we meet.

I feel a boundless capacity for impertinence unfolding itself within me.

"Yes, indeed, there would not have been much chance for you then; he's a '*baronite*' and you are '*a shade or two wus*,' as you must allow; but fortunately for you, I don't think his dear mamma would let him come out so late at night for fear of getting his feet wet."

"As are yours," says Dick, looking down at my boots, which are all shiny with the dew. "Is he coming to-morrow then?"

"Perhaps so; who knows what luck is in store for one?"

"He seems to bestow a good deal of his company on you; how long is it since he was at Lestrange last?"

"The day before yesterday," reply I readily.

"Humph! cannot understand a fellow making himself so much at home in another man's house; a man might as well keep an inn."

"Who was it?" inquire I, with the air of a person desirous of information, "who was it that came to call at Lestrange with Mrs. Coxe yesterday, and by himself to-day; have you ever happened to hear of such a person?"

We are walking along slowly side by side, past the alder bushes, further down the brook, where we need not stand in awe of the miller and the milleress's *espionage*. Dick has got a light overcoat over his dress clothes, which are very plain; no embroidered shirt-



front, or jewelled studs. Dick is twenty-seven and has passed the jewelled age, which is as regular a period in the history of man, as the wood, the bronze, and the iron, are in geology.

"I'm different," says Dick, gravely.

"Are you?" ask I, looking up naively. Next minute I am sorry I said it, for I see that he is vexed.

"If *you* don't see it, of course it is not so," he answers coldly, and sticks his nose up in the air, and looks as tall as a steeple.

"I do see it, of course; in the first place you are twice the size of him, he is such a dear little duodecimo edition of a man, I could rest my chin on the top of his head, with the greatest ease imaginable."

Dick's nose descends from the clouds, and he passes his arm round me, "I'll go down on my marrow-bones before you, and then you can do the same to me; it is a nuisance, being such a lumbering great brute, nobody ever gives you a mount."

We have reached a spot where, two months ago, a great girthed oak spread its arms to the air, and its roots to the stream. Where it stood, there it lies now; all along by its friend, the brook, that sings a little pretty dirge for it. We have had to cut down every stick of timber on the property; every stick, except trees as valueless as the hollow elms in the avenue, that are too old even to make paupers' coffins.

"Let us sit down, Nell," says Dick, "I think we may defy the eyes of the mill now, and I don't suppose they've got opera-glasses."

"It's to be hoped not," I say, laughing; "I shall have to run the country if they have," which being



interpreted means that *both* Major M'Gregor's arms have disposed themselves around me now.

"I never thought I was given to jealousy before — I always thought Othello the biggest fool out," he says, while the honest gray eyes look rather wistfully into mine, and I see myself reflected in the dark pupils; "but I don't know, I don't feel easy about that fellow somehow; why *do* you plague me about him?"

"How should I know it would plague you?" I ask very gaily, "you seemed such very dear friends to-day, 'my dear fellow'ing and old boy'ing' each other, that I thought you would be pleased to hear that he was a dear friend of ours too."

"I knew him in India; all through the Mutiny with him; he is the dearest shot I ever clapped eyes on. They used to get him to pick off those black devils; he bagged a good deal of black game!"

"Were you great friends then, *really*?"

"Oh average! we always hit it off very well; he is a very good straightforward fellow, though he won't set the Thames on fire. He can ride a bit too; and he has got a modest competence of something under £ 30,000 a year; *that* covers a multitude of sins."

"I suppose it does; I wonder what it feels like," I say with curiosity.

"Do you know, Nell" — says Dick, and I see his wide white forehead oddly white, when contrasted with the brownness of the rest of his face, contracting a little as with some pain — "do you know, Nell, I have not sixpence to bless myself with, that I am as poor as Job?"

I nod. "Yes; I know!"



"Who told you? Lazarus' reputation precedes him apparently!" (Very sharply).

"Nobody."

"How on earth did you find out then? do I *look* poor? is pauper written on my face?"

I rub my cheek gently against his shoulder.

"I felt sure you were poor; nice people always are! rich men are always short, and old and ugly." (I am thinking of the one Dives of my acquaintance). The sun is dead, but has left half his beauty behind him; at the mere memory of him, the whole Western sky is a-flame, there are no watery lilac tints streaking the rich crimson that faints away into pale clear gold, and dusky blue. "And at evening ye say it will be fair weather to-day, for the sky is red." The rosy flush is catching at the tops of the churchyard yews; and striking up along the old gray tower like a thought of heaven in a weary life. At our feet, the little burn goes wimpling down to the distant river; a small swift current in the middle, and under the bank little amber pools, where the tiny baby fish can shelter their semi-transparent bodies from the sun. The big ones are swaying their slender bodies 'gainst the stream, which has force to make the "lush green grasses" on its banks bend downwards with it, long and drenched like the hair of a drowned maiden.

"I suppose," says my impecunious Plunger, rather dolefully, looking down and tugging at the ends of his moustache, which are not waxed, "I suppose, if I had done what was right and honourable, I should have sheered off as soon as I found I was getting hit; but it's an awful grind doing one's duty. If it would but lie in a pleasant direction for a change, it would have



more chance of having some attention paid to it; and I really did like you so much, Nell, that, duty or no duty, I had to tell you so. By-the-by, what does your sister think about it?"

"Think about what?"

"About you and me."

"I don't know what she thinks about me, I'm sure; nothing particularly flattering, I fancy. But she thinks that you must be engaged to Amaryllis Coxe; at least, she said so this morning."

"To Amaryllis! God forbid!" says Dick, fervently. "I'd rather a millstone were hanged about my neck, and that I were drowned in the depths of the sea. By-the-by, Amaryllis or *Ammy*, as her sisters tersely call her, is not unlike a mill-stone either in weight or shape. Your sister put the saddle on the wrong horse that time, didn't she?"

"She was so positive about it, too, that I thought I must have made some mistake. I was beginning to make up my mind that I must look out for a fresh situation."

"I see. That partly accounts for the pear-trees; a Roland for my Oliver; a Lancaster for my Amaryllis. But seriously, Nell, doesn't she *see* how the land lies? I should have thought that it did not require spectacles."

"There's none so blind as them as won't see," I reply, oracularly.

"And you did not tell her?"

"Not I; I never tell her anything."

Dick looks puzzled.

"That was it, I suppose, then. I thought, of course, that you knew all each other's secrets — my



sisters always do." (Dick has not realized the fact that there are sisters and sisters.) "So I began to say something about you to her this morning, and she shut me up rather; did not seem to know what I was driving at, you know; began to talk of something else."

The flush is dying out of the sky's cheek; the remembrance of the dead sun is growing faint as the memory of the human dead weakens beneath the weight of the crowding years; the buttercups have gone to sleep, each with his little cup full of dew; and the cows are making up for the time they wasted at noon, when they stood knee-deep in the brook, and combated the flies, by feeding now as if for a wager; we hear their short quick bites in the evening stillness; and the stream goes whispering on, carrying little sticks, and green leaves, and fallen cherry blossoms from the mill orchard higher up, as a present to the gray distant sea.

Dick's and my hat are making each other's acquaintance at our feet, and the rising moon is turning our respective red and yellow *chevelures* silver, as the old bugbear with the scythe will do for us by-and-by, if we wait patiently. I don't believe that Dick will ever be an old man. I cannot fancy him with his handsome mouth fallen in, and his handsome eyes melted out; cannot picture him hobbling about in a list shoe, mumbling his dinner with the wrecks of those strong white teeth, and having to be roared at before he can hear what is said to him.

"The sound as of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune,"



says Dick, in his deep voice. Dick can take a capital bass.

"Do you ever read poetry, Nell?"

"Oh, yes; very often. I have read 'Lara,' and 'We are Seven,' and the 'Lord of Burleigh,' and the 'Needy Knife Grinder,' and 'Samson Ago — Ago — something,'" reply I, glibly.

Dick smiles.

"Homer, Plutarch, and Nicodemus,  
All standing naked in the open air."

"What has that to say to it?" inquire I, wondering what put that indelicate and irrelevant couplet into his head.

He pinches my cheek.

"Nothing; only I thought that your pieces of poetry seemed to have about as much relationship to one another as those three elderly gentlemen."

"You asked me what I had read, and so I told you," I say, rather injured. "It is not my fault that they are not related to one another, any more than it is that you are not related to the great Mogul."

"It was very rude of me," apologizing, though the offending smile still lurks. "Tell me something else about your studies, and I'll swear to be as grave as a judge."

"There's nothing to be told about nothing," say I, with chagrin. "Papa knows everything; Dolly knows most things, and I know nothing. That's the state of the case. You thought it fair to tell me that you had no money, and I think it fair to tell you that I have no learning and no brains to get any."

I turn away my head, and the tears, always within hail in my case, come stealing into my eyes.



"I don't believe the last, and I don't care a straw about the first," says Dick, putting his hand under my chin, and bringing my rueful countenance round within reach of his eyes.

"Perhaps — perhaps —" say I, still rather lachrymosely, and making the remark to his shirt-front, on which I have been good enough to deposit my rough, chestnut head, "perhaps you'll try and teach me something. I asked Dolly once, but she would not."

Dick laughs, and strokes my hair.

"*I?* I can teach you the platoon exercise, and how to make cartridges, and shall be very glad to do either if you think they would help you; but I don't think that my capabilities go much further."

The church clock strikes ten; tells the dead people that they are an hour nearer their release — so clearly and sweetly each beat comes sounding over the quiet land. I resume the possession of my own head, and jump up.

"I must go home, else I shall be locked out."

"There *would* be the devil to pay, then," says Dick, standing up, too, and stretching like a big Newfoundland.

"I shall be late for prayers as it is, and I always read them."

"Oh, you *can* read, can you, ma'am?"

"Yes, I can manage anything under five syllables."

"Why does not Miss Lestrangle act parson? You seem to have no idea of the rights of primogeniture."

"Dolly does not like prayers. She says that they are a great farce, and that she cannot see why, if a



person wants to say his prayers, he cannot say them to himself, without dragging in all the household to help him."

"They'll have a holiday from family worship at Lestrangle to-night, then, I take it."

"Yes, sure to. Well," (with a long sigh) "it has been very pleasant. Good night."

"I'm willing to bid you good night any number of times, but if you think you are going to get rid of me here, you are mistaken. It's Lancaster's turn now. How do I know that he may not be dodging round the corner somewhere?"

So we stroll away together from the silvered sedges, and the poor barked tree, and the spot where we have been doing our best to lay in a stock of rheumatism, and swelled joints, and shooting pains for our riper years, the pennilessest, improvidentest, happiest pair of sweethearts in Great Britain. Walk as slow as we may, and no tortoise can beat us, ten minutes bring us to the parting gate. There we pose ourselves in the attitude of the famous "Huguenot" picture.

"I don't think you can come to much grief, Nell, between this and the Hall door. Good night, my darling. You are *my* darling, and not Lancaster's, aren't you? God in Heaven bless you!"

"*Yours*, if you'll have me; if not, *nobody's*," I say, very earnestly; and then we kiss each other twenty times, where we first kissed, beneath the big white lilac bush.



## CHAPTER XVI.

A HOUSEHOLD where woman reigns alone, freed from the dominion of her natural enemy; an entirely female establishment, leavened by no admixture of the masculine element, is a very dreary thing. So I found to my cost during that long, long week.

The man of a family may be, and often is, a very inferior animal to his woman kind; made of infinitely poorer, commoner clay; he may be a coarse, surly brute, all body and no soul worth speaking of, or a soul wrapped up and enfolded in swine and turnips, or in gray shirting, or brown sugars, or pill-boxes and blisters. Even so, the sound of his heavy boots on the stairs, of his gruff, untuneful voice, mixes harmoniously and healthily with the women's noiseless, cat-like foot-falls and shrill treble pipes. Good is his unbeautiful face at dinner; good are his dull anecdotes, that yet bring a whiff of the outer world with them; yea, good are his very hat and dreadnought in the hall.

Women's minds are apt to get narrowed, soured (the best women's have an undeveloped tendency that way), if they have not some male intellect to rub against, and be wholesomely jostled and buffeted and sweetened by.

How dumb the old house seemed that week! I don't think Sir Adrian, Sir Guy, and Sir Fulke, can be much dumber as they "lie in glory" under the chancel of Lestrange Church. Outside, the thrushes and blackbirds sang, the cocks crowed, the dogs barked, the ploughboys whistled, and I caught myself wishing earnestly that they would all come indoors,



and make their pleasant noises in the hall, in the ghostly galleries, in any room or rooms they pleased, just to break the weary silence, the silence as of a house where a shrouded body lies confined, a tenantless rigid clay image. Dolly sat through the long hours, motionless as a statue, tinted with life colours, like Vishnoo contemplating his own attributes and god gifts in the shining heart of the Swerga.

My fingers itched sometimes with a profane longing to box her ears, to upset her out of her chair, to do anything unseemly, just to shake her out of her frozen content with herself and that endless gray stocking, which was of dimensions suited to a manly leg, and yet not destined, as I knew, for our papa's wear.

"Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do,"

is about the most veracious couplet ever indited by Mr. Watts of busy-beeical memory. Even if he leaves our hands unprovided with work of his; leaves them to hang down harmless by our sides, or folded in our laps, he makes up for his forbearance by giving our minds double tasks.

How rigidly must those early Eremites, those holy men who loved their souls so much, and soap and water so little — how rigidly, I say, must they have adhered to their Lenten fare; upon how few bitter herbs, upon what undiluted water must they have dieted themselves, if they did really succeed in keeping all earthly imaginings away from those lichen-curtained rock-crevices where they were wont to stow their lean tormented bodies out of harm's way. To lock the door against those ideas, "earthly, sensual,



devilish," that throng the portals of an empty soul, must have been even a harder job than the exclusion of the lizards, newts, and other "miscreated forms of life" that frequented those dank, agueish abodes.

My mind misgives me concerning those bearded, ragged, vermined saints, that their bald-shaven pates enclosed thoughts as naughtily mundane, and as mundanely naughty as any of their helmeted and wigged coevals; that that hair cloth (stranger to the washing tub) covered hearts that beat to as worldly a tune as any devil's jig. Man's spirit is so essentially irreligious, so honestly God-hating, that, leave it to itself for one minute, it turns its back upon its Maker; runs away from Him swifter than a jagged lightning flash, "anywhere, anywhere."

Montaigne counsels an infrequent use of prayer, because, saith that chatty old heathen, man's soul is so rarely in a suitable attitude for addressing its Creator. The premises are right, though the conclusion is wrong. What do we see in the depths of our tall hats when we gaze so devoutly into them in church? When we lean back with folded arms in our corner of the family pew, while the parson is

"Bummin away like a buzzard clock ower our heads,"

are we thinking of Heaven's high King, and our position relatively to him; or is not rather our fancy running riot among our pleasant sins? We call them to us, one by one; we look into their dear faces, and give them a parting hug, whilst God's messenger is giving his parting warning or promise to us. These remarks are somewhat out of place here; but they would do nicely for the backbone of a sermon when I



have leisure to compose one. It may be objected by some one that the pleasant sins of an innocent-minded girl of nineteen must be few and far between; that I (such as I have described myself) could barely have had enough iniquities to meditate upon, to fill up many of those vacant hours.

Iniquities, perhaps not! sins, perhaps not, according to the lax worldly interpretations of the term; but of silly, witless, profitless conceptions and whims I had great store. There seemed to be nothing but feeding times to look forward to that week; from breakfast to dinner, from dinner to tea, we travelled sluggishly, with no emotion livelier than what the sight of minced collops or hasty pudding was calculated to call forth.

If one of the chimneys would but catch fire; if that unsafe garret where the man hanged himself in Queen Anne's days, would but fall in; if even one of the dogs would but have a fit, or puppies, or anything; if *anything* would but happen! thought I. Something *must* happen before long; even if I myself had to pull the strings that set the machinery in motion. I began to have a morbid longing to do something startling, something that would break the gelid monotony of my existence. In my pretty vacant head — I can talk of its prettiness now without airs of mock modesty; now, I say, when it is as much a thing of the past as Helen's or Aspasia's — I began to cast about what action at once extremely eccentric and extremely naughty I could perform.

Should I slay Dolly in some new and ingenious manner? should I practise some picturesque form of suicide? should I drown myself in the garden pool, and be found with my long red hair inextricably en-



tangled among the duckweed? or should I choose some sequestered spot in which to "snip my carotid," and be discovered beautiful but gory, with an explanatory billet in my lily hand?

I was saved from the difficulties attendant upon the selection of either of these enticing endings by the occurrence of two small incidents which diverted my planings and imaginings into other channels. The first incident regarded the butcher; the second, Sir Hugh Lancaster and "that other." The butcher may be dismissed *paucis verbis*. He came, he saw, whether he conquered or was conquered I am not very clear.

One morning I stood by the garden pool, looking down rather ruefully at the duckweed, and hoping that it would not get up my eyes and nose and ears when I should commit myself to its shining breast in despairing yet becoming self-slaughter, Dick having proved faithless, or having been killed in the wars. What wars, whether French, Kaffre, or Sikh, I had not decided; there being, at the time I write of, an equally remote probability of our picking a quarrel with either of those nations. Among onion beds and cabbages, and through the well-sticked peas came Mrs. Smith in panting haste, and with woe in her eye.

"Oh, my dear, Miss Nelly, the *butcher!*" As the war-horse is popularly supposed to snort at the trumpet blare, so snorted I at that fear-breeding name. "I've spent all the breath in my body trying to make him let it stand over till next week; them pigs oughter bring your pa in some money then; but he won't hear till it, he's in the room now (ellipse for housekeeper's room) stormin' shameful that he is!" I picked up a stone and flopped it into the pond, making a hole in



the duckweed. "I've been to Miss Dolly, and tried to get her to go down to him; she's such a rare good'un to palaver folks, she is! I thought she might make somethin' of 'im, but she did not seem to care nothin' about it. She said if he threaped the roof of the 'ouse off, it wasn't none of her business." I fished for a floating piece of beeka bunga with a stick, coveting its small blue star flowers. "'Put not your trust in princes,'" said I, gravely, "that is in Miss Dolly, who, if she isn't a princess, ought to be one."

"If I'd a known," said Mrs. Smith, expanding her fat hands to catch the pond breezes, "all I should ha' 'ad to put up with, along o' that man I'd a seen him eating snails at Jericho, with a two pronged fork, afore I'd 'a let 'im inside our doors; they're the independentest lot about 'ere as ever I see, *that* they are; there aint no doin' no good with them, nohow."

I let pass, without criticism, the redundancy of negatives in my house-keeper's last clause. I was still immersed in hooking up wet lengths of water-weed.

"And what the *jouse*," (sic) perorated Mrs. Smith, rising into sublimity, as she stretched a drab stuff arm to Heaven, "I am to say to that ould *blaygaird*, I know no more than the babe unborn."

My piscatory efforts were by this time crowned with success. I had tugged up great sprays of greenery, and now grasped them lovingly in my bare white hands, while they dripped abundantly over my dress.

"Pretty things," said I, invoking them inwardly, "are my eyes as blue as you, I wonder? I must ask Dick." Then aloud. "I know what to say to him, Mrs. Smith, though you and the unborn babe don't;



and what's more, I *will* say it before I'm ten minutes older." Whereupon I left the pond, and the becca bunga, and the potherbs, and ascended, lightly to the upper chamber, where I kept unrevealed to Dolly, to Mrs. Smith, or other living soul, poor Dick's banknotes. Armed with them, and with his bill, I repaired to the encounter with the "fat greasy kill-cow," as Southey christens one of that fraternity. I entered the "room," as Mrs. Smith called it — the room, *par excellence* — with my head up and my nose in the air. Oh for those fine old days when the fowls of the air built their nests in Justice's disused scales, when the Sieur Lestrangle might take twenty lances and transfer as many fat kine as seemed good in his mind's eye, from his low-born neighbours' premises to his own.

Happy, happy days, when gentlefolks lived at ease and duns were not. So, in I stalked, with my chin superciliously elevated, and my money in my sack's mouth. There he sat, the vile *roturier*, red-faced, vituperative, with a glass of beer beside him, which Mrs. Smith had given him as a peace offering. There he sat swilling our beer (that smallest, sourest of all malt liquors), and reviling us.

"I believe you want your bill paid," I said, haughtily, while Mrs. Smith gave my gown a great jerk of dismay at my lofty deportment, from behind.

"I *rayther* believe I do, miss," responded my creditor. "I've been a wantin', and a wantin', and a wantin' it anytime this last twelve munse, but it don't seem much good a wantin' hanything in this 'ouse."

I tossed down his bill and four of my bank notes with it.



"Give me change, please," said I superbly, "and be quick about it."

As I spoke, I think a feather might have floored the great man-mountain before me. Two round eyes, stolid, unspeculative as his own oxen's, stared even rounder and rounder at me; he did not move hand or foot.

"Be quick, please," I said again, very imperiously, and gave a little stamp. He escaped apoplexy by a near shave that time; after all, there was the money, and that was all that was his business, "though *sewerly* it was odd how them Lestranges managed to get hould on it." So he thrust a hand as big as a fillet of veal into his pocket, and counted out the change, and then, calling for a pen, scratched his receipt.

"Now," said I, with my eyes flashing in my triumph, and the Lestrangle blood burning in my fair cheeks, "leave the house this instant," and I waved my hand towards the door, "and never set foot in these doors again, do you hear? Go, this minute."

He was cramming his bill and his notes into his breeches pocket; then he prepared to obey me.

"I'm agoin', miss," said he, grinning; "don't you be aputtin' of yourself about; and I do hope as you'll find some one as 'ull serve you satisfactory, and bring you all the best *jints*, and not expect to get a farden for them neither, that I do. Good-day to you, miss."

He was a low fellow, wasn't he? but I'm not sure that he had not the best of the argument.



## CHAPTER XVII.

FEW, indeed, were those of the families dwelling round Lestrange that had not contributed a combatant to the siege of Sir Hugh Lancaster. Lestrange itself was no exception to the general rule; we had sent forth our eldest hope, or rather she had sent herself forth to the fray, and, after a protracted campaign, had returned to us, worsted, indeed, but in good order. She had never fought in the foremost ranks, nor had she ever been amongst the leaders of the Crusades, being too wary for that; but for all that she had laid lines of circumvallation, had set up battering rams, and pointed cannon as sedulously as the noisiest, vapouringest of her rivals.

But the lines had been laid so stealthily, the battering rams brought up so quietly, and the cannon pointed so noiselessly, that when she returned discomfited, having been compelled to raise the siege, none knew the fact, none knew that there had been a siege at all, except the besieged town itself, and one that viewed the carnage from afar, to wit, myself.

Dolly, unlike the bulk of her nation, knew when she was beaten; once thoroughly foiled, she never renewed the attack, whether by escalading, mining, or any other mode; she kept her scaling-ladders for walls more accessible; she laid up her javelins and cannon balls to hurl against iller-defended ramparts.

In Sir Hugh, I think, must have been lacking some one of the ingredients that go to compose a man; he was the sole individual of his species that ever I met with who appeared totally impervious to the be-



seechments of those maddening eyes that ordinarily upset the manly reason from its throne, and made the manly head giddy and staggering, as with strongest new wine. He did not appear even to see them.

Dolly was very civil to him after those days, and cooed pretty little speeches to him when they met, but she never missed an opportunity of giving him a sly little stab behind his honest back, and she "hated" him with the hate of "hell."

Had Sir Hugh and Dolly been cast upon some desert island, it is my belief that each would have kept to their separate half, each have had their own banyan trees, and fountains, and caves; they might perhaps have exchanged nuts and roots, and other savage delicacies, but their intercourse would have been confined to that till some night, when the tropic moon was bathing in the plunging tropic waves, Dolly would have stolen to Sir Hugh as he slept under the feathery palm trees, and have cut his throat with a sharpened stone, or strangled him with her strong white fingers; she would then have taken off his handsome signet-ring and his hunting-watch, thinking it a pity that they should be wasted; would have buried him neatly in the shelly sand, that he might not infect the torrid air, and would then have sat down and watched "the sunrise broken into scarlet shafts," with calmly waiting eyes.

That dreary week came to an end, and still papa made no sign of an intention of returning to his leathern arm-chair, and his handsome daughters, and his duns. One morning, Dolly and I sat as usual at our *tête-à-tête* breakfast. Most refreshing was she to look upon, as she sat there calmly munching her bread



and butter, the sleep not yet quite gone out of her heavenly eyes. Her hair was all swept back, tidily and comfortably out of her way, behind those ravishing little ears, and gathered up into a delicious ingenious sort of twist behind, the mysteries of which no manly mind could pretend to fathom. Her dress, simple enough, was of some thin, cool summer stuff, of a rich, bright Forget-me-not blue, and round her dear little white throat hung a gold locket, in which lurked the photograph of the latest victim. She turned over her unopened despatches with slight leisurely fingers, and made comments on their exteriors before opening them. "A bill," she said to the first, tossing it away. "Another from that stupid boy! what a bore! I shall have the bother of writing to him again; and No. 2 was passed carelessly by. "Lady Lancaster's hand, I declare!" The bread and butter is dropped, the envelope is torn open, and Dolly becomes immersed in the contents. I likewise have a letter — a letter written in a big bold hand, with a very broad-nibbed quill pen, and about two words, or one long one, in a line. Thus it ran —

"My Darling, — My leave will be up on Friday; I have tried to get extension, and failed. They're up to the 'urgent private affair' dodge now, so go I must, I suppose. Will your father be home before then? I want very much to have a talk with him, on what subject I think you'll guess. Write to me one little line, my pretty one, and say something kind, for I'm awfully low at the thought of going.

"Your very fond  
"R. H. M'GREGOR."



Before opening this document, I had had a very good appetite, and had surveyed the viands with a hungry eye; now I felt that one mouthful would choke me. My hands were trembling, and my cheek flushing when Dolly's calm voice wafted these few words to my ear, "Do you wish to read this?" she held out Lady Lancaster's note, inscribed with niggling little characters, and headed with a monster monogram, in which half the letters of the alphabet twisted their legs and bent their backs against each other.

"Dear Miss Lestrangle, — My son tells me that you and your sister are quite alone at Lestrangle. Will you come to us to-morrow for three days, as we have a few friends coming to us? Please excuse such a short notice, as I did not know you had returned before.

"Yours sincerely,  
"A. J. K. N. LANCASTER."

"P.S. — Major M'Gregor, who I think you know, is to be among our party."

Lady Lancaster's characters were of the crabbedest, "scribbled, crost, and crammed," "hard to mind and eye," as Merlin's charm; any word might have been any other word: "friends" looked like "fiends" "house" like "louse," "quite" like "guts," and "days" like "dogs." However, I mastered the gist with great rapidity, and left the minor difficulties for after-consideration.

"Shall we go, Dolly?" asked I, and I covered my mouth with my hand, to hide the broad smiles that would come rippling, dimpling over it. *Hei mihi!* What a capacity for pleasure feeling one has in one's green youth! To feel either pleasure or pain is a sign



of weakness; if we could ward off things noxious, hateful to us; if we could procure at will things profitable, jocund, we should never experience either sensation, but rest in a calm, immovable nothingness.

"I joy because the quails come; would not joy  
Could I bring quails at will,"

or something to that effect, says Browning's Caliban. Our sources of enjoyment grow fewer, and dwindle at every fresh section of our lives.

In childhood we enjoy everything, from the devouring of uncleanly compounded lollipops upwards, everything except being washed and saying our prayers. In youth we enjoy most things; the screws and springs of our earthly machine are in such prime order; the wheels of that chariot that will drive so heavily by-and-by, run so smoothly and glibly, that we think they must needs be running to some pleasant goal, as they are in such a hurry to get over the ground to it. In manhood we enjoy many things, though each year knocks off one or two from the shortening list. In old age we enjoy few; the wheelless, springless waggon lumbers toilsomely along a rutty road, and in death — nay, in death, I know not what we do, nor what we leave undone — yea, I know nothing concerning it.

My hand is on the thick black curtain, whose warp is darkness, and whose woof is grief; when next the hedges, burgeoning now, are putting forth their sprouting green, I shall have raised the curtain, and have found out what there is behind it. But, oh, my friends, I cannot come back to tell you; if I shriek with agony, if I laugh with rapture at what I find there, you will not hear me.

"Shall we go, Dolly?" said I.



"I don't know what *you'll* do, I'm sure; *I* shall go."

"There's no reason why I should not go too, is there, Dolly?" I went over and knelt down by my sister, and put up my small white face to be kissed. I was so happy that I loved everybody, even Dolly (with a spurious sort of affection, it is true). Dolly stooped a reluctant pink velvet cheek towards mine; she looked upon two women's kissing one another as a misapplication of one of God's best gifts.

"No reason whatever," said she, with cold cheerfulness, "except that you have nothing but rags to go in."

I rose hastily from my knees, with my desire for osculation quite quenched.

"All the better for you," said I, a little bitterly; "I shall make a better foil than ever."

"I'm quite satisfied with you as you are," Dolly said; and with this parting shaft she withdrew.

Twelve hours more, and I am transferred from the ancient domicile where the rats and we hold a divided sway to the substantially hideous brickdust coloured pile, where Hugh Lancaster and his household gods dwelt with his mamma, well content.

Two aged coach-horses (whereof one was spavined and the other had spring-halt, and both were overfull of grass), yoked to our triumphal car, *i.e.*, a dilapidated yellow-bodied barouche, hung high in air, in which papa and mamma had taken their wedding tour, bore my sister and myself to Wentworth Park. It is ten o'clock, and the brave and the fair are all assembled in the yellow drawing-room. There are a good many people, but not a great many.



The gentlemen have just torn themselves from Sir Hugh's' 47 port, and are huddling, most of them, about the door, black-backed, white-throated, with the Briton's inborn grace in each of their attitudes. The ladies, in blue and pink and purple, and fine twined linen, and with many natural productions in the shape of flowers and butterflies and feathers, and beetles about their heads, are dotted about the yellow satin. The yellow satin is Lady Lancaster's very own taste; she matched it by her cheeks, and then lavished it on sofas and ottomans and chairs. It makes most people look hideous by night and jaundiced by day.

Let me give a short descriptive list of the company among whom I find my lot for the present cast: Sir Hugh, in broadcloth and high good humour; his mother in wrinkles and Point d'Alençon; a thin viscount with a handsome wife, who bore a year of her lord's income on her fat back; a man in barnacles, supposed to be a genius, because he never spoke and had one or two nasty tricks; a puisne judge, who to his acquaintance's exceeding dolour, was very much up in political economy; a tall young man, who had a bad cold; and a short one, who wore death's-head studs and made jokes; an agreeable old gentleman, who did not believe in anything particular, and had a certain proclivity towards *double entendres*; a young lady, with sharp shoulder blades, and another with a sharp tongue; a widow with a great many bugles about her, who rather relished the agreeable old gentleman's innuendoes; a big fair man of the name of M'Gregor, and two artless virgins of the name of Lestranger. The judge has got the cheerful old sceptic into a corner, and is inflicting a new form of the question on him.



"We must ameliorate the condition of the rural poor, my dear sir, that's what we must do," he is saying, very confidentially, as if he was telling some pleasant secret. "We must set sanitary reforms on foot throughout the country; that's what I have always been saying. I can tell you" (lowering his voice) "that the utter neglect of sewage in many of the agricultural districts would surprise you, it would indeed."

"Yes, yes, I dare say, no doubt," replies the unhappy heathen, uneasily, edging away from his captor, and looking as if he did not much care whether there was one sewer throughout the length and breadth of Britain or no. He has got a succulent anecdote which he is panting to pour into the widow's rosy ears.

"I bet a dabsake of yours the other day," quoth the man with the catarrh to the man with the skulls, "he was a cordet in the dideth; they had some dick-dabe for hib; the *Dose*, I think it was."

"The *what*?"

"The *dose*, because he had such a big dose, you dow," touching his own afflicted feature, explanatorily.

"What a cold that poor man has got!" says the viscountess, with fat compassion.

"Does not he wish he was in bed, poor wretch?" says the sharp young lady, pertly. The shoulder-blades agitates her fan softly, and sighs behind it.

"Aren't you tired of standing?" breathes Dolly, low as the south wind when it blows the down from the clematis, to a large and stately person who is leaning over her.

"Is that a hint for me to go?" responds the large person, making no movement, however, towards so doing.



My sister says, "Oh, no!" semi-audibly; and the thick, white lids sweep down over the modest eyes. Dolly is sitting on a prie-dieu, right under the big, hundred-lighted chandelier, and the waxlights are blazing down full on her shimmery sheeny garments, on her round pearl-white shoulders, and on the coral lengths that go twisting in and out of her blue black hair. Dolly is doing no harm at all, none whatever; only she is looking up under her eyes in a way I know, a way I cannot do myself, and that I hate.

Dick rests his arms on the back of the prie-dieu, which is diverted from its original use this evening; he looks very handsome and a good deal out of sorts; his yellow moustache droops close to her ear, as he talks low and rapidly to her, occasionally looking up to scowl at me.

For myself, I am in a position which I would willingly cede to any one else in the room, should they propose an exchange. I am seated on a sofa (yellow, of course), by Sir Hugh, and we have a picture-book on our laps (half on mine and half on his), and he *will* keep his head very close to mine, pull away as I will; and the consequence is, we have, to a casual observer, a very lover-like and *flirtatious* air.

Over against me, is a big mirror, in it I catch occasional glimpses of myself. I see a little head "brow-bound with" the "burning gold" of its own ruddy locks. I see great blue eyes that look childish and troubled, and about to cry, and I see a good-sized but withal pretty mouth quivering distressedly. We are looking at prints from Landseer.

"Jolly kind of dog that," says Sir Hugh, "aint it? had one just like it myself once, only mine had more



tan about the muzzle; best sporting dog I ever had. Came to awful grief, poor brute, though, got caught in a trap and had to be shot. I never was so cut up about anything, I don't think."

"Perhaps so," I murmur, with utter irrelevancy.

"Perhaps what?" cries Sir Hugh at sea.

"Did I say perhaps anything — oh, so I did. I — I don't think I quite understood what you were saying. Truth to tell, I am straining my ears to catch Dolly's remarks. My ears do not look very long ones, but they are long of hearing."

"Does not Nelly look nice to-night?" She was sighing in her honeyed way. "What would not one give for that freshness of sensation? We old people have *effleuré* all our pleasures, haven't we?"

Dick's answer is addressed to the back of her head, so I lose it.

"Half child and half woman? Ye — es, I think so, combining the amusements of both ages too, isn't she, lover and picture-book?"

Dick bit his golden moustache, and his gray eyes flashed angrily.

"She must be mighty easy pleased, if Lancaster's conversation can afford her *amusement*."

"Oh, I don't know; she's young, and — well, perhaps — but indeed Major M'Gregor, I think that facility of being pleased and attracted is a very enviable possession. If one had it, one would never feel lonely in society, as one sometimes does now, doesn't one?"

One swift satanic shot from the dark, passionate, sympathy-craving eyes; a shot that reached his senses, I think, though it missed his heart.



"Do you sig, Biss Seybour?" asks the cold in the head of the shoulder-blades.

"Sometimes — to intimate friends — now and then; do you?"

"Do; but I'be very fod of it. Do you dow a sog called 'Baggie's Secret?'"

Miss Seymour bites her fan in perplexity.

"'Baggie's Secret?' No — o, I think not; who's it by? Oh, '*Maggie's* Secret,' to be sure; how stupid of me!"

Miss Seymour does know it, loves it, and will sing it if he wishes. My Hugh and I have reached the last of our dog portraits.

"H'm! come to an end, have they?" says Hugh, trying to split the last leaf in two with his broad thumb. "Never mind, there's lots more somewhere."

He rises to seek more pabulum for my mind and eyes, and I stretched out an eagerly detaining hand.

"Oh, *please*, won't it do another time? I think I've seen almost enough pictures. I'm — I'm a little tired."

The worthy baronet regarded me with surprise plainly written on his broad brown face.

"Tired! nonsense! are you? Have some sherry and soda? Mother, here's Miss Lestrangle so knocked up she can hardly move; what are we to do with her?"

Lady Lancaster and the Point d'Alençon happily do not hear; are rather hard of hearing indeed.

"Oh, don't, don't, please! it's nothing, only the room is a little hot; isn't it?" cry I, panting.

"Ah, yes; so it is, now you mention it; quite like an oven; I never can get mother to have the windows



open; come into the next room, it's much cooler there, and we shall have it all to ourselves."

What an inducement! thought I. The waxlights blaze steadily oppressive; the singing girl's voice comes harshly to my ear; the yellow satin glare tires my aching eyes, and across blaze and glare I see a Greek face, a very cross Greek face, scowling prohibition at me. Oh, why is he scowling at me? what have I done? what can I do? "We shall have it all to ourselves," repeats honest Sir Hugh, with his jolly voice not a note lowered. The heathen, escaped from his corner, is getting to the point of his spiced tale; its cayenne is tickling the widow's palate; she is chuckling behind her black-edged pocket-handkerchief. The air is faint with patchouli and ess bouquet, and heavy scented gardenias.

I feel a hysterical lump rising in my throat, and the angry Greek face is clouding before my eyes. I am going to cry! I am going to make a scene! I am going to make a fool of myself! I rise hastily; and, upsetting a light cane chair, and two Chinese gods in my passage, pass hurriedly down the room, through the folding doors into the cool empty saloon beyond, while Hugh, sore amazed at my indecent haste, follows hard upon my heels. Dolly's voice, pseudo-compassionate, pseudo-motherly, pursuing, stings me. "Poor Nell! that *empresé* manner is very pretty, isn't it?"

---



## CHAPTER XVIII.

"LIVE as long as you may," says Southey, "the first twenty years are the longest half of your life." It is a reflection so trite, as to be made by every living soul capable of that mental process, ycleped thought, that one of childhood's days is equal in duration to five or six of man or womanhood's; that one of childhood's years is a Sæculum, a mighty Æon, whereof the beginning is more distant from the ending than are the Tudor days from ours. Was the case the same, I marvel, with those giants in age that flourished and withered before the Flood?

Those unfortunates, on whom was inflicted the penance of a thousand years of labour and sorrow, did their earlier days spread and stretch themselves in the same disproportionate fashion? Did they grow to maturity, I wonder, as soon as we do? Were they full grown at twenty, middle-aged at fifty; and were their remaining eight or nine hundred winters devoted to old age? Oh, monstrous notion! A land peopled with dotards! a world full of gray heads and gouty feet, and age-palsied intellects. The alternative, though more probable, is *assez drôle*, in its necessary and legitimate consequences.

At a hundred years old, those ill-starred ones were still spinning tops and dressing dolls, if antediluvian dolls there were; at two or three hundred, they were making love, and getting into those scrapes to which hot-headed youth is liable; at five hundred, they were thinking of settling down to the serious business of their lives. Were the memories of those ancients strengthened



in proportion to the length of time they had to be exercised upon?

Did they remember in their eighth or ninth century, what they said and did in their first and second, or were they in their later days oblivious of the actions and passions of their youth? Could a man in King George's reign have any very distinct recollection of what he was thinking about in King Alfred's?

"I know not; what avails to know."

I have heard it affirmed by sane people, and have read in divers books, that breakfast forms the cheerfulest, socialest réunion of English home life. Whosoever stated that fact, whosoever wrote it, I take upon myself to deny it. *Tout au contraire*; that interesting animal, man, so curious in many of his habits, is at that hour at his worst. A remnant of sleepiness, unknown to themselves, clings to most people; they have not warmed to their day's work. If the new organizing of society were intrusted to me, I should make it as indecorous to breakfast in public, as it is now considered to perform one's ablutions in the presence of that vague personage, the world.

Whether social or not, breakfast is over at Wentworth; much kippered salmon and cold tongue have been consumed, and a little slack conversation has been kept up. Dolly, knowing that there is a time for all things, has molested no man with her eyes, has contented herself, at least, with two or three quite trifling glances at Dick, whom Fate had deposited at her side. Breakfast then is over, has been over an hour or more, and most of the tenants of that red brick Elysium, Wentworth Park, are standing and sitting



about the hall, pulling on gloves, reading the *Times*, and settling disputed claims to pot hats.

Before the door, out in the spring sunshine, stand many horses, *malely* and *femalely* saddled; likewise a double dogcart with a pair of light-hearted chestnuts. Most of the ladies are in riding-habits; the widow among the number, and very like an overripe gooseberry, she looks. I am unclad in riding gear; I have never bestriden (or the feminine equivalent for bestriden) anything nobler than a jackass; never shall possibly. It is evident we are all on the verge of some expedition. Most of us, it is true, would rather stay at home; to many of us, indeed, a pic-nic is verily and indeed the accursed thing.

Two or three of the men are yearning to throw a fly in the trout stream, that goes purling, twisting, flashing through Sir Hugh's fat meadows —

"Thro' the meads where melick groweth."

Two or three more would far fainer be a-peppering of rooks, and a-ratting with pink-eyed terriers than squiring of dames along a dusty road. No matter. The trout, speckled, pink-fleshed, silvery, may, jumping, gulp down live flies in peace to-day. No fictitious fly framed of delicatest feather, and finest silk, will this day beguile them.

We are to be amused, all of us, *nolentes volentes*, not in our own way but in Lady Lancaster's. I am among the very few *volentes*. I am not looking my best this morning, having been crying most of the night, and there is a red rim round each eye; but of red rims, red noses, and haggard cheeks, I am careless, for I am sitting on the topmost one of the flight of stone-steps that lead up to the hall door.



Dick is stretching his long length, like a big Newfoundland, one step below me; he is looking at the chestnuts, and smiling and saying: — "Won't we put them along at a tidy pace, Nell? We'll take the shine out of them?"

By one brilliant *coup*, I have retrieved last night's disasters; at least I think so.

Five minutes back, Dick was leaning against the door-post, looking glummer than glum. Nobody was nigh save me. Dolly was upstairs, Sir Hugh was rating one of his grooms. What an opportunity for prompt action. I go up and put my hand on his arm. "Dick," said I (I had never called him Dick before), "Well?" (very glum), "What have I done? why are you angry with me?"

"I am not angry," (with averted head, but slightly thawed intonation).

"If you're not angry, do drive me in the dogcart to-day, instead of riding; you know I cannot ride; *do, dear Dick!*"

As I make this indecently forward proposal, my voice shakes, and my heart thumps like a steam ram. Dick's head veers round like a weathercock in a high wind.

"Won't I just? if I have the chance; what a little darling you are! but you see the cart is Lancaster's — not mine, and perhaps —"

Sir Hugh coming up, interrupts him.

"You're for riding, I suppose, ain't you, M'Gregor? Carriage exercise isn't much in your line; at least it used not to be, and there's the roan all ready for you."

"Oh, thanks, old fellow," responds M'Gregor, "but



if you don't mind, I've rather a fancy for tooling these chestnuts along. I don't seem to care much about peacocking along the king's highroad."

Sir Hugh's countenance falls.

"All right," says he (his face says "all wrong"), "just as you like, only you'd better keep an eye on that off mare; she is the very devil to pull when there's anything behind her; don't blame me, Miss Lestrangle, if you find her flourishing her heels in your face."

Dolly standing near, overheard. She was holding her habit up delicately with one hand, and slashing a small Balmoral boot with her whip.

"Had not you better get your cloak, Nell?" she suggested, "we may be late coming home."

"Perhaps I had," said I, and up-stairs I ran, two steps at a time. Dolly followed me, made a remark or two upon my dress, and upon no other subject, and then went down again. I was a long time finding my cloak; having discovered it at last in the depths of a trunk, I redescended to the hall. Dolly is gone; the riders all are gone, but the dogcart is still there; Sir Hugh is still there, and Richard is not there! I stare blankly.

"Why I thought Major M'Gregor was to drive me?"

Sir Hugh's mirth runs over in laughing eyes and a broad grin.

"Yes, so he was, but your sister made it all right; awfully jolly of her, wasn't it?"

"How — how do you mean?" I gasp.

"Why she told him you were rather nervous about horses, and that you were rather alarmed at what I



said about the mare; that was all my eye, you know. She's as quiet as an old cow."

"Well, go on," said I, digging my teeth into my under-lip.

"Well, he stuck to it like a man for a long time, till at last she had to tell him — jolly girl she is — that you had hinted to her — she said you did not like to speak out — that you'd rather have me for a Jehu; he gave in, then, in a minute, like a sensible fellow. Come, hadn't we better be starting! Mind the wheel?"

My heart, like Nabal's, turns to stone within me. I get in, mechanically.

"Give her her head," shouts Sir Hugh to the groom, and off we go. The chestnuts are a showy, high-actioned pair, and step well together; full of oats are they; swiftly do they bear us along.

"We by parks and lodges going,  
See the lordly castles stand,  
Summer woods about us blowing  
Made a murmur in the land."

Only we did not see any "lordly castles," because there were not any such on the Lancaster estate. Instead we passed by many a substantial farm and homestead, with barns and stacks, and trim out-buildings, that told of a good and a well-to-do landlord. Hugh points out his possessions with complacency as we bowl past them.

"D'ye see that copse over there, with the lot of scrubby brushwood there, down in the hollow?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the very best cover in the county; always find there; never missed once last season."



"Oh."  
I am determinedly sulky, and register an inward vow that no sentence longer than a monosyllable shall be extracted from me. The hedges are white with hawthorn; on the orchards the rosy snow of the apple blooms lies thick, the blackbirds are singing, and Sir Hugh's heart is merry within him.

"Nice little box that, isn't it?" says he presently, indicating with his whip a snug cottage, buried in cherry trees and laburnums. "My governor built it for an old bailiff of his. I've got a lot of greyhounds there now for coursing."

No comment whatever.

"Do you like coursing?"

"No."

Our destination is a certain show place, fourteen or fifteen miles from Wentworth, a place that appertains to a certain earl, who has so many houses, show and not show, that he is quite puzzled to know which to live in. The equestrians reach the bourne to which all we travellers are hastening sooner than my Hugh and I do; they are able to take advantage of bridle paths and wood paths and narrow lanes, in which, if we attempted to traverse them, we and four our-wheeled vehicle should stick. So our delicious tête-à-tête has lasted an hour and three-quarters ere we reach the great wrought-iron gates that give ingress to Wilton Towers, and roll through the park among the oak-clumps and the fallow deer and the thick deep bracken. The place of rendezvous is by the side of a mere, much affected by coots and wild ducks and Canada geese — a piece of water more remarkable for extent than beauty.

Here we find our associates mooning and loafing



about, like unburied spirits on the hither side of Styx; heavy and displeased are most of them. Of such a *fête* as the present, the eating part, the fleshpots and flagons, forms the marrow, the pith, the kernel; hitherto these ladies and gentlemen have been put off with husks and rind; and very cross it makes them. We pull up under a spreading horse-chestnut which is tossing its white spikes in the sunny breeze.

"Stop a bit," says Sir Hugh, throwing the reins to the groom, "don't be in a hurry; I'll lift you down."

My sole response is to hurl myself to earth. The velocity of my spring precipitates me to the ground, and of me it may truly be said, in the words of the poet —

"Humpty Dumpty had a great fall."

Half a dozen men rush to pick me up; but I am beforehand with them, and rise to my feet with two great green patches on my dress, where my knees have saluted mother earth. When things come to their worst they always mend, which is not to be wondered at much, considering that there cannot be a *worser* than worst.

The only thing is, it is so difficult to know in this world when our fortunes have reached their nadir; there are so few depths that have not yet a deeper deep beneath them. Heat and horse-flies, and midges, and the headachy snappishness which is the result of heat, formed the lowest abyss to which poor humanity in our persons was called upon to descend to-day. Half an hour after my *culbute*, life, I think, wore a cheerfuller aspect in the eyes of most of that roasted assemblage; Wilton Towers seemed a more desirable



demesne, and even the twelve miles' ride home a more bearable prospect.

At the expiration of that wonder-working thirty minutes (the two grooms being the *Dei ex machinâ*), a white tablecloth lies, like an exaggerated snow-flake, beneath an oak-tree, big enough to have sheltered a dozen blackguard King Charleses in his great leafy heart. Spoons and forks flash in the sunshine that filters through his thick green cloak, tall sloping-shouldered bottles cool themselves in the mere; there is a scent of mint sauce on the breeze, and the young acorns, looking down out of their cups, see beneath them baked meats, frequent as those which adorned the obsequies of Hamlet, King of Denmark, and yet were enough (they must have been a little stale, mustn't they?) to "coldly furnish forth" his widow's marriage banquet. Pasties were there,

"Costly made,  
Where quail and pigeon, lark and leveret lay  
Like fossils of the rock, with golden yolks,  
Imbedded and injellied."

Juicy chickens, and juicier lamb, lobsters lurking redly in crisp lettuces, and pastry enough to furnish a cook shop.

Round these cates we sit *accroupis*, on the short fine grass, and feast to the sound of "the long ripple washing in the reeds."

"Capital Sauterne, this!" cries the disbelieving old bachelor, holding up his glass to the light, to see the foam bead sparkle diamond-like. "I wonder where Lancaster gets it; I've tried half a dozen places, and never could get hold of anything decent."

"It *is* nice," owns the widow, sipping.



"By-the-by, *àpropos* of Sauterne, did I ever tell you of a *bon-mot* of Lord ——, the late man, you know, not the present?"

He travels a little nearer to the bereaved one, along the turf, and his wicked old eye twinkles (he has not had the heart to unpack any of his little anecdotic wares, for her benefit, hitherto).

"No, I think not; tell me now, *do*."

"I'm almost afraid, but it really is too good to be lost."

His voice sinks to a *susurrus*, a *chuchottement*, either of which words is more onomatopœiatic than whisper. The widow lends him her ears, and I see them reddening under the combined influence of the Sauterne and the *bon-mot*, which was, I think, a very *mauvais mot*.

"Nice little cob of yours, Lancaster — that black one," says the lean lord; "easy as an arm-chair. Do you ever hunt him?"

"No," says Hugh; "he's hardly up to my weight, particularly over a stiff country like this; he'd be just the thing for you, and he's A 1 at timber."

(All the Lancastrian geese are swans.)

"Is there any *bustard*?" asks the youth with the influenza. "Biss Seybour wadts sobe bustard; Atcha! Atcha!"

"Bless you," murmurs Miss Seymour, under her breath; the benediction being called forth by the sneeze, not the demand for mustard. I, of course, am next to my host; I always am; people begin to leave that coveted post vacant for me; I made a feeble effort to shirk it at the beginning of the entertainment, but was foiled. Hugh is drinking bottled beer, and making brilliant remarks, and sharing his *petits soins* pretty



equally between the silent dove beside him, and the not more silent doves in a pie before him. Dick M'Gregor and Dolly Lestrangle seemed to have hardly more appetite for their luncheon than I had; they could not well have had less.

Flirting is, in one respect, like wit — it has never been satisfactorily defined; it is less fortunate than wit, in that it has not yet found a Bishop Barrow to expend pages of gorgeous eloquence in describing it. No object, they say, looks exactly the same in two pair of eyes, nor are any two people's notions on the subject of flirting precisely alike.

Dick and Dolly, however, fulfilled all the conditions required by all the different ideas of all the different people then present, on this vexed theme. Firstly, they seemed to have a very great deal to say to each other; secondly, they did not seem to have anything whatever to say to any one else; and thirdly, what they had to say to one another, they appeared compelled to say in a stealthy and secretive manner. Dick's face was troubled "as if with anger or pain," as he lay reclined, like a young river god, among the yellow irises by the rushy margin of the lake. His hat was off, and the sun was busy weaving an aureole like a saint's round his curly head. Poor fellow! there was not much of saintly repose, and there was a great deal of earth's unquiet passion in that honest angry face.

I never knew any woman who could compare with Dolly Lestrangle in the art of drawing out and waking into rampant life any spice of the devil which might be lurking latent in a man's soul. She was waking Dick's devil now; I saw her — saw the evil spirit



gradually shaking off its sleep, and coming with a lurid light into those eyes which had looked before only vexed, and pained, and thwarted.

Dolly was not a fine woman, as they say, at all; not *beef to the heels*, by any means; in a grazier's eye she would have had no charm whatsoever. She looked very girlish and simple now as she sat on the grass, leaning on one slight arm, her slender figure looking slenderer than its wont even, in her dark tight-fitting habit, out of which her throat rose, like a lily stem from its sheath,

“Les yeux noirs  
Vont au purgatoire,”

you know, she is saying, in her low tender voice; “poor black eyes! that's treating them very badly, isn't it?”

“Your eyes are not black, brown, surely?” says he, with interest.

“No, black, I think — aren't they?”

She raises them full of innocent wondering inquiry, and fixes them on his; rests them there unabashed; neither speaks for a minute, then Dolly, in a half whisper —

“The moon will be up as we go home to-night, won't it? we shall see it in that pretty brook we came down by, shan't we? but, perhaps — oh, I forgot —”

She stops, as though in confusion.

“Forgot what?” he asks, eagerly.

“I forgot that I mightn't — mightn't be riding with — *you*, might — be riding with somebody else; and then I thought —”

“Thought what?”



He bends closer to catch a glimpse of the down-drooped head.

"Oh, nothing — nothing; it was only that — that I thought I should not care much about the brook, or the moonlight, or anything else — *then*."

The great velvet orbs passionate, passion rousing, seek his again, seem unable to tear themselves away. What man can stand it? Dick cannot. I see the broad low brow flushing. I see his eyes *answering* hers; speaking that mysterious thrilling fire-language that surely the devil invented.

"Why should not we ride home together?" he says, softly.

She plays with the wide-open iris flowers, with the stiff, wet iris stems that lie in her lap.

"You might have got tired of me, mightn't you? is that *quite* an impossible hypothesis? Do men ever tire of women?" I think I've read somewhere that they *have* done such a thing before now."

"Never of *some* women; wasn't it of a woman that it was said —

'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety?'"

She shakes her head with pretty incredulity. "Cleopatra was Cleopatra; if her case had not been a unique one, her story would not have come down to us; we cannot all, or indeed any of us, expect to have her luck." She sighs, and I see under the dark blue cloth of her bodice, her heart fluttering.

"You live on air, Miss Lestrangle," sounds Sir Hugh's deep voice, as he regards me remonstratingly,

"With his heart full of love,  
And his mouth full of pie."



"No, I don't," I respond snappishly, like a little yelping cur, with his tail between his legs, snapping at a big dog's nose, "pickled salmon is not air, that I'm aware of." The fact is, I have got some pickled salmon on my plate, and am sorely bested to know how to dispose of it, for swallow it, most surely can I not; I could as soon swallow Hugh. I should like to hurl it, and the platter that contains it, and any other crockery within reach, at Dolly's sleek shapely head; but that may not be. Unguessing of the storm in a tea-cup beside him, in a state of blissful unconsciousness, Hugh takes up the thread of his discourse, begins a new thread rather, for — dear fellow — he is a little discursive.

"We shall have to *do* the house just now, I suppose; walk through a mile and a half of execrable pictures; I will say that for Lord Stencliffe, he has got more vile daubs and bad copies together than any other man in England."

(Oh, for that cut-glass decanter to aim at the bridge of Dolly's nose! oh, to make those black eyes black eyes indeed!)

"H'm! has he?"

"I wonder why one ever comes to see these sort of places. I never heard any one say they liked it — did you? it's an awful bore, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is; most things *are* awful bores in this world, I think — and people too!"

Sir Hugh laughs lazily; champagne and sunshine, and a heavy luncheon will induce a certain blandness of manner and indisposition to take offence; he laughs as one laughs at a parrot swearing, or at the rage of anything equally impotent.



"Ha, ha! most people means *me*, I suppose; why are you always so down upon me, I wonder?" I gaze straight before me into space, and feign deafness.

"Never mind!" he says, good humouredly. "I've a pretty tough hide, and I'd rather be pitched into by *you* than kissed by anybody else!"

Hugh never thought it necessary to lower his voice when he said anything tender. The expression "love whisper" never could be applied to his amatory commonplaces; love-shout or love-bellow would be more applicable; any one that chose to listen might hear; he was not saying anything he was ashamed of. Dick does hear, and draws his smooth brows together into a frown. Dolly does hear, and says, with a pretty, playful, dimpling smile —

"Lovers' quarrels! Poor little girl! I hope he is not trifling with her!"

The poor little girl, listening, winds her pocket-handkerchief tight round her fingers, till it is converted into a ropy, stringy rag, and then bites a piece out of it. *Fête champêtre* has a pleasant sound, but I think the sound is pleasanter than the reality. I think, in sober earnest and in literal truth, it is sweeter far to have one's legs beneath the friendly mahogany, where lively grasshoppers cannot get up them; in a cool dining-room, where one enjoys immunity from phlebotomizing gnats and midges.

The Wilton flies and gnats drew much human blood that day, but we bore our being "let blood" meekly; it was part of our appointed torture. Meekly also we bore the house, and the Dutch Madonnas, and the Lelyan and Knellerian portraits, and the lying anec-



dotic biographies tacked on to each by that obeseest of housekeepers; meekly also the chapel, with the place where the family sat, the place where the ladies' maids sat, the place where the footmen sat; meekly also the gaudy new window to Lady Grace's memory, where a very big blue St. Peter, and a rather big red St. John, and a green impotent man, stood huddled together in close proximity, with a gate anything but "beautiful," picked out in yellow in the background. Everywhere Hugh followed me like St. Nicholas's pig.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"TIME is but a parenthesis in eternity," as somebody grandly says (I always forget the sayers of grand things); if so, what must each of our lives be? A parenthesis in a parenthesis, and a very short parenthesis too. Our life is but as a very little boat tossed on the sea of infinity; it is a small breathing place between the tussle with life at the beginning and the tussle with death at the ending. Poor little lives! what immeasurable self pity fills one, when one thinks of our poor little farthing rush-lights, that often, before they are half burnt, great Death blows out! And yet all our reflections and lamentations and moralizing on the brevity of our abiding here, does not do anything towards making one dull minute seem shorter, or greasing the wheels of one tedious hour.

Did the assured knowledge that my existence was but an imperceptible speck in the fields of space make that long long road between Wilton Towers and Wentworth Park seem a quarter of a mile shorter that night?



Not it. Endless appeared to me the lengths of moony turnpike, the wood-shaded windings and twistings among Lord Stencliffe's great quiet oaks and beeches.

Whether it was all love and no champagne, or all champagne and no love, or half love and half champagne, or three quarters love and one quarter champagne, or one quarter love and three quarters champagne, I cannot say; but certain it is, that Hugh became inconveniently tender — tender in the moonlight, tenderer far in the shade. I, in my own mind, ascribed an undue preponderance to the champagne element, and suffered agonies of apprehension lest the grooms behind should overhear his amorous platitudes.

"Jolly and big the moon looks, doesn't it? like a Cheshire cheese!" The moon, the sacred moon, the be-songed, the be-sonneted moon, the moon that Romeo swore by, and that Milton saw

"Stooping thro' a fleecy cloud,"

like a *Cheshire cheese*!

"How poetical," said I, sardonically.

"No, it isn't poetical, I know. I'm not up to the dodge of poetry. I don't go in for those kind of things. I would though, if it would make you like me any better."

Cupid and the vintage of Epernai have infused a certain sentimentality into the dark middle-aged eyes that contemplate me.

"How soon shall we be home?" I ask, abruptly, looking at him uncomfortably, and thinking how plain the crow's feet come out in the moonlight.

"Home! Why we've hardly set out yet. We



haven't got to the fourth milestone by Thorny Hill, you know!"

"*Haven't we?*"

"What are you in such a hurry to get home for? I feel as if I should not mind going spinning along here for ever behind such tidy cattle and with *you* beside me!"

As he speaks we reach a toll-gate, and the sleepy toll-keeper descends in a slight and sketchy attire, suitable for the wooing of Morpheus, opens the gate for us, and shuts it again behind us. We are coming to a part of the road which runs parallel to the railway for a quarter of a mile. Rather a dangerous bit of road, for this reason, there is but a narrow strip of field intervening between it and the line; and people with fidgetty horses have found before now the disadvantage of such close proximity to a possible locomotive, at full speed.

We are going along at a spanking trot through the dumb May night; there is not a sound but what we make ourselves. Suddenly the sharp shriek of an engine, as it issues from the tunnel through the Marston Hill at our backs, cuts the stillness.

"Hang it!" says Hugh, "there's a train coming. I hope to God they won't bolt!"

I turn my head, and see the great dim bulk, with the red lamps at the buffers like glaring eyes, devouring space a hundred yards behind us. Then it comes roaring, puffing, thundering by. For a second the chestnuts stop and stand motionless, shivering with terror; then quick as thought, as lightning, they wheel right round. Snap goes the pole, and off we go, tearing down the road we have just come along. The



broken pole swings to and fro, kicking and banging against their legs, goading them to madness; thud, thud, come the off mare's heels against the splash-board.

"*Damn*," says Hugh, under his breath. "Sit still, Nell?"

No need to give me that injunction. I could not budge an inch if I was to be shot for it. Stock still I sit there, clutching the side of the dog-cart with one hand. The elm tree boles flash by, white in the moonlight; past race the dim harebell carpets beneath them; past rush the hawthorn-crowned hedges. We are nearing the toll-gate.

"By G—," says Hugh, hoarsely, "the gate's shut!"

I see him setting his teeth; he plants his feet against the splash-board, and pulls with all the force of his strong wrists. I see the veins rise in knotted cords on his hands, in the intensity of his exertions. To no purpose; there is no perceptible diminution of their mad speed! With heads down and mouths like iron, on they rush; in two minutes we shall be crashing into the gate, knocked to smithereens probably. Suddenly Hugh gives one vigorous tug to the right rein; I see what is coming, and stretch out my hand involuntarily to clutch him — to clutch anything — then — smash we go into the hedge bank.

When I discover myself again, for my body has outrun my spirit, I find myself standing on my head in a clump of violets. I reverse myself as soon as possible, that is to say, I return to the position nature intended for me, and erect myself upon my legs again. I look about me, but at first am too giddy to make



out anything; everything goes whirling round, and there is a buzzing, surging sound in my ears.

Then I see Hugh likewise picking himself up from among the thorny hedge, where he has been making his downy bed. Down the road the horses go, galloping wildly, dragging the dog-cart on its side along with them. In the ditch sprawls one groom, rather stunned, and from the field on the other side comes the voice of the other, shouting a doleful inquiry as to whether we are killed. Hugh comes staggering, rather dizzily, over to me.

"Are you hurt, Nell?" (very anxiously), no trace of champagne.

"No—o—o, I think not. I — I — believe I'm going — to — to — die!"

I have a recollection of the look of horror on Hugh's countenance at this announcement; then a vision of his arms stretched out, and my tumbling into them, and then my spirit went away for a space, as spirits will sometimes, though whither they go has never, by ancients or moderns, been satisfactorily explained.

As soon as my soul comes back from that trip — how long it is absent I know not — I begin to sneeze violently, and my eyes water profusely, which is the less to be wondered at, as I find a very large bottle of strongest salts held right under my nose, and sending its pungent vapours up my nostrils. I push it away, and look about me. I am in a room I never was in before, an inn parlour evidently; a small room where stalest tobacco and stalest beer contend for kingship over the dominion of smell; a very big-patterned brown and yellow paper on the walls. Lord Stencliffe in a cocked hat and red coat, and with a battle more



furious than Armageddon, of which he is apparently unaware, raging behind him, over the chimneypiece; Adam and Eve *au naturel*, over the sideboard; the woman of Samaria, very embonpoint, in a corner; a broken lustre and two crockery lambs on the mantleshelf, and three or four horse-hair chairs.

I myself am lying on a very hard horse-hair sofa; a tidyish elderly woman is standing over me, brandishing a brandy bottle, and oh horror! oh shame! oh infamy! Hugh's arm is under my head, and his face with the middle-aged eyes and the crow's feet — his face — its mahogany streaked with blood, is within two inches of my nose; he is hanging over me like a mother over her baby.

"Feel better?" he asks, concernedly.

Instantly I struggle into a sitting posture.

"Yes, thanks, I'm all right again now, I think; hadn't we better be going home? is the carriage mended?"

Hugh laughs.

"Mended! not exactly! I have not heard tale or tidings of it yet; if the traces have not broken, it's some way beyond Wilton by now, I should think. I have sent Jackson after those brutes, but I'm hanged if I know when he'll be back again."

I gaze blankly at him.

"How are we to get home then?"

"Ay, that's the rub," he says; "they have not got any sort of a trap that can take us here. I've sent Smith (he was the other groom) walking to Wentworth, and I told him to go as quick as he could, and get them to send the brougham for us."

"How soon can it come?"



He takes out his watch and calculates.

"He's been gone about a quarter of an hour, and it's five minutes past ten now, and it's eight miles *good* to Wentworth — an hour and a half, two hours and a half — three hours; it *may* be here in three hours, that is, if he ever gets there; but he was rather muzzy when we left Wilton, and that *spill* has obfuscated his intellects still further, I'm afraid."

The calmly, cheerful way in which Sir Hugh makes this promising statement *roiles* me — to use a word sanctioned by Clarendon, though fallen from its first estate now — considerably.

"If you thought there was a doubt about his getting there, why on earth didn't you go yourself?" snapped I.

"And leave *you*?" says Hugh, reproachfully, still kneeling beside me.

Neither words, tone, nor attitude are lost upon the goodwife, as I see. She coughs a little, and looks or makes as though she is looking towards the plump Samaritan dame in the corner. I vault from the sofa, as if the spirit of a flea had passed into me, and walk across the room; my legs feel stiff and sore, and I experience an inward longing that Hugh would have the sense to leave the room, and enable me to examine into the number and extent of my casualties.

"Won't the lady take anything?" asks the female Boniface, demurely.

The lady declines, but the gentleman says —

"Take anything! of course she will! Why, it'll be hours before we get home again; bring in some tea directly, and something to eat; chops, or ham and eggs,



or anything, it does not matter what, and — have you got any decent beer?"

When did an Englishman forget to pay his orisons to his great and beneficent god, malt liquor! Of course they *have* decent beer, more than decent — admirable beer, at least so our elderly friend asseverates, and Hugh signifies his intention of migrating to the bar to partake thereof. The landlady and he pass into the little flagged passage, and close the door behind them. I, left to myself, sit down by the window, curse my fate, and those unmannerly blood-mares, and count the bruises, great and frequent, on my shins. Presently the hostess returns with a clean table-cloth and tea-things.

"The gentleman 'll soon be back, 'm," she says, consolatorily, to me.

"I dare say."

"He's just gone 'alf a dozen yards down the road to see if he can see hanythink of the man and them brutes of 'osses."

"Oh, has he?" with ostentatious indifference to the communication.

"Do you feel quite yourself again, mum?"

"Quite, thanks."

She arranges a black-glazed tea-pot and two cups and saucers, and then recommences her attack.

"I was so thankful when you come to yourself when you did, mum!"

"Were you?"

"Yes, 'm, because of the gentleman, I mean; I never see a gentleman so put about, about hanythink; no, never. I thought he'd agone off his 'ed a'most."

I see her glancing stealthily at my left hand.

("I should not have cared much if he had," said I,



internally.) "Perhaps he'd never seen anyone faint before?" I suggested, aloud; "perhaps he thought I was dead!"

"Well, indeed, mum, when you fust come in it gev me quite a turn, *that* it did; 'e was a carryin' of you in his harms, and your 'ead was a 'angin' down over 'is shoulder, and your mouth was hopen, and your face was as wite — as wite as that table-cloth; I did raly think you was a corpse at fust."

I relapse into silence, and vultures gnaw my heart. I, in Hugh's arms, with my head hanging over his shoulder, and my mouth open! Disgusting tableau! Not only disgusting, but public; witnessed by the two grooms and the landlady, certainly; by a barmaid and a host of boozing boors, probably.

Hugh returned in about a quarter of an hour from his unsuccessful quest after his refractory cattle, and we sat down to tea. It was horribly honeymoonish, as I felt! I poured out Hugh's tea, and he helped me to mutton chops. I did not feel the least inclined for eating, but it was something to do, better than staring at my *vis-à-vis*. When the landlady came in to clear away the tea-things, she found us both sitting on the little window seat, quite *loverly*, looking out on the gooseberry and currant bushes, and the sweet basil and mint and marigolds. My Othello,

"Somewhat declined into the vale of years,"

was pouring tales of

"Moving accidents by flood and field"

into the ears of a most unwilling Desdemona.

"What a fright I *was* in when you said you were



going to die! I thought I had killed you! What *should* I have done if I had!" he ends, sentimentally, reverting from his Sebastopolian and Lucknowian experiences to our late perils by dog-cart.

"What *would* you have done?" I replied, sarcastically, "why I suppose you'd have had the *body* (me, I mean) conveyed in here, and then you'd have had some beer, and then you'd have posted off to Wentworth to break the news to Dolly!"

"*That* I shouldn't."

I don't know whether he intended me to ask what he would have done; if he did I did not gratify him, but stared out at the gooseberry bushes, and tried to count the nascent gooseberries on the nearest one. Having no further pretence for staying, the goodwife left the room, to my regret. I miss her chaperonage, the whisking of her sage-green stuff dress, and the cheerful clink of the teaspoons, which sufficed instead of conversation. When she was gone the stillness irked me; it is not a cooling or a soothing process sitting at dead of night alone on a narrow seat with a man who *will* keep edging an inch every five minutes nearer you, and who never moves his eyes from your face.

"I wonder that woman did not know who you were," said I, for the sake of saying something. "She talked of you as *the gentleman*."

"Not to know me, you think, argues herself unknown; well, she's a stranger in these parts, that's it — poor old girl! She was sorely puzzled to make out our relationship to one another, wasn't she?"

"I should have had the greatest possible pleasure in explaining to her that there was not any relationship whatsoever," I answer, drily.



Hobnailed boots stump along the flagged passage into the little bar; men are talking and drinking there; the barmaid's tee-hee, inharmonious, as the laugh of the uneducated always is, rewards their sallies, and mingles with their haw-haws; they are smoking evidently, for tobacco smoke — bearable now, because fresh — creeps under the door, and assails our noses.

"How does the time go?" I ask, restlessly.

"Five and twenty past eleven."

"Is that all?" (with great disconsolateness of tone.)

"Does the time seem to you to go so slow, *Nell*?"

His arm is, I find, establishing itself on the sill behind me.

"Yes, dreadfully slow," I say, impatiently; "and don't call me *Nell*, please — I don't like it."

The house grows silent, the guests return to their homes, and to the rods their expectant wives have got in pickle for them; the aborigines retire to bed. Hugh and I are virtually alone together — alone with the stars and their mother, the night. Oh, grave, sweet night! how solemn you are! type and figure of death! I know not which is most solemn, a calm or a stormy night; it is but the difference between an angry God and a God at rest. How often have I watched the stars overspread

"The cool delicious meadows of the night,"

and longed with hot impatience to be floating, upborne, on spirit wings, through those soft dusk fields, finding out how far they spread; and what treasures of delight they held in their airy depths! Night brings back, vivid and clear to us, the faces of our dead ones; gaudy day scares and chases their pale eidola,



but in the night we bethink us of the look they wore, of the words they spake, ere they

“Folded their pale hands so meekly”

and laid their heads on the Reaper's breast. In the night we think steadfastly of our departure — we realize that it will be — that some day we shall surely get that letter signed with the sign manual of the Great King, that letter that bids us set our houses in order, bids us kiss tearful wife and little ones, bids us rise up and come away, for *He* needs us. At night we probe the soul-wounds that the turbulent brawling day has inflicted; we lay to them the salve of humblest prayer and deepest penitence — we make up our accounts with God. But if we would conjure up our dead, solitude must be the Witch of Endor, whose incantations arouse them for us; if we would ponder in sober seriousness upon our sins there must be no distracting thought, no distasteful company, no impertinent irritations to mar the influences of night and silence.

In that ever-to-be-aborred night I speak of, I was not alone — not alone, though I would have given one or both my ears to have been so. I was harried by the company of a man, my indifference for whom was fast merging into loathing. Poor Hugh! there was nothing loathable about him, as I see now, on calm retrospection — nothing, except his efforts to act basilisk or charming serpent, a part for which his eyes and the whole cast of his countenance singularly unfitted him. I begged him to take off his watch and lay it on the table, that I might not have to be perpetually appealing to him to know how the time went. Rest-



lessly I rambled up and down the room, every moment seeking information from the impassive China face of my familiar. Stock-still stood, or seemed to stand, the hands; the progress of the minute was as imperceptible as that of the hour-hand. I could not sit quiet; it seemed as if I were on wires, or had a fit of the crebles. I turned my uneasy eyes helplessly round; what could I do to curtail my sufferings? A few books lay on the little side-board — a few books and a tumbler full of daffodils. I perused the titles eagerly. A Bible and a prayer-book, a tattered primer, Alleine's "Alarm to the Unconverted," and Cumming's "Great Tribulation," the two latter presented to Martha Harris by her kind friend, the Rev. Mr. Smith.

Anybody's "Tribulation" was an attractive title to me now; it woke my sympathy. Was not I in great tribulation myself? Perhaps it might frighten me, or amuse me, or shock me, or do something towards making me forget that dreadful watch and more dreadful man. I get through half a page, and then recur to my old wonder, "how's the time going?" I rise and look. Half-past one!

"It ought to be here by now, oughtn't it?" say I, looking dolorously across the flare of the tallow candles at Lothario.

"It will soon, I dare say," he replies, cheerily. "Probably they were all in bed when he got there, and it would take some time knocking them up, and putting the horses in."

I bring the "Great Tribulation" over to the table, and bend my eyes resolutely on its gloom-breathing pages. The print is very small, and the prophecies are of a nature to make the stoutest heart quail, the



limpest hair stand on end; they seem to me only horridly dull. I look up one page and down another; look to see where the chapter ends, and whether it looks pleasanter further on; then I yawn; then I take a peep at Hugh. He is leaning his elbow on the table, and his brown hand is shading his brown eyes, which are taking an inventory of my charms apparently. Some impulse prompts me to say sharply,

"I wish you would look at something besides me?"

"Why should not I look at you, if I like?"

I turn over the pages with quick irritation.

"Because — because it is tiresome and stupid, and you might find something better to do!"

"There's not much to do here, good or bad, and I don't want anything better."

I turn my back upon him, and peruse a paragraph of an uncomplimentary nature about the *Beast*.

"Nell!"

"I asked you not to call me Nell."

"What am I to call you, then? may I call you Eleanor? Miss Lestrangle sounds so stiff."

"You need not call me anything."

Tick, tick, tick, goes the kitchen clock; somebody is snoring overhead.

"Why *will* you turn your back upon me?"

"Because I hate being stared at," I reply, pouting.

"By *me*, I suppose that means; it would be a different tale if it were that long-legged M'Gregor."

This is the first trace of jealousy and spleen I have yet discerned in easy-going Hugh Lancaster. I wheel round with great velocity.

"You've no right to say that," I flash out, vehemently; "no business to say it; it's mean of you."



"Mean!" he cries, angrily; "that's the very first time any one ever applied that word to me!"

Then he subsides; I think he perceives the absurdity of our sitting there, storming at one another, at dead of night, in that dreary little pot-house.

"Never mind!" says he: "you're a privileged person; you may say what you like."

The candles burn low in the brass candlesticks; the morning wind — wind that carries away so many ebbing lives on its chill pinions, arises; the stars die, and —

"O'er night's brim day boils at last."

"That idiot has lost his way, as I thought he would," says Hugh, whose weather-beaten face looks haggard and grim in the dun misty light.

"Yes," said I, reproachfully; "and if you'd gone yourself, as I wanted you, we should have been back hours ago."

"It was your fault," he replies, rather downcast by my persistent snubbing. "Cannot you forgive me for liking too much to be with you?"

He says it so bluntly and so humbly that I feel compunction. I stand by the window, and watch the dawn's birth. I can almost see the wind

"Waking each little leaf to sing."

Even a hot day often comes in coldly, and sitting up all night is not warming to the blood. I shiver.

"Are you cold?" Hugh asks.

"Yes, rather, and my arm smarts a little; I wonder did I bruise it when I fell."

I pull down my sleeve, and consider my maimed



limb. What is there in nature or art so pretty, so appealing to the senses as a beautiful arm? Mine was beautiful, round, and firm, and polished like marble, that some god had kissed into warm life; with dear little nicks and dimples about elbow and wrist. I find a big black bruise, and two or three long red scratches on the soft cream-white flesh. "It hurts," I say, looking up rather ruefully at my companion, somewhat after the manner that a dog does that has got a thorn in his foot, when he comes limping up, with upheld paw, to any one he thinks in his doggish mind looks friendly. Mahogany faces can look loving and pitiful just as well as alabaster ones, though they don't do it so becomingly. Hugh's did now. Oh, the perversity of this human nature of ours! Why, in the name of common sense, could not I look loving too? Why could not I feel loving? Why could not I tumble straightway into his honest ready arms, as he stood there with

"The lights of sunset and of sunrise mixed"

upon his face: stood there, unkempt, unshorn, grizzly as a mechanic on a week-day? To fall into his arms was to fall into the arms of £12,000 per annum, and a house in May Fair. It included the ideas of clover for life; fine clothes, high feeding, and other delights. "Poor little arm," he says, "we must get some plaister for it: let me kiss the place to make it well!"

His moustache just brushes the surface, has not time to do more, before I snatch it away as from a hyena about to mumble it; snatch it away from £12,000 a year, as if it had been twelve brass farthings paid quarterly. "Leave me alone, *do!*" I



cry, fierce as a young tigress, looking volumes of outraged virtue at him; "will you never understand that I *hate* you?"

Hugh pales, as men do in any strong emotion; it is their equivalent for women's "*torrent de pleurs!*"

"I have been rather dull of comprehension," he says, "but don't be alarmed; I understand now *fully!*"

We retire to two different corners, and glower at one another. The house awakes and shakes itself; girds up its loins for its day's work; the barmaid and the ostler are heard exchanging matutinal gallantries in the bar, and the landlady enters slipshod, curl-papered, to "know what will be for breakfast?" Breakfast! Oh, ye gods! shall we then have to undergo another grievous tête-à-tête repast? Shall I again pour out Hugh's tea? Will he again help me to ham and eggs? As I thus ruminate, despair creeping coldly over me, even while Mrs. Harris urges lamb chops on Hugh's notice — even while the savour of bacon, incipiently frizzling, insinuates itself through the walls, I hear the sound of wheels.

Eagerly I run out to the inn door, and stand with hand shading my eyes from the morning sun, while the Blue Boar swings above me. Surely, surely, I know those big bays, and that sociable — behind which and in which old Lady Lancaster and her yellow wig make their weekly pilgrimage to church. I rush back to Hugh, crying joyfully, "The carriage is come! hurrah!" and fall to youthful caperings and actions, expressive of intensest relief. I know now with what accent a shipwrecked mariner shouts, "A sail! a sail!"

Hugh looks askance at me and my gymnastics;



then comes out, and damns his servants; wishes to know why the devil they have not come sooner, and what the deuce they mean by their d—d impertinence? In fact he is in a towering rage, such a rage as they have not seen him in since he came into the property, twenty years ago. It surprises them a little, and amuses them a good deal.

The explanation of their non-appearance before, is easy. Smith, as his master had opined, had lost his way; never had been very clear about it, and had dropped into the Red Lion, three quarters of a mile further on to refresh his memory; consequently had not reached Wentworth till an hour and a half ago.

Mrs. Harris has to eat her fried bacon and drink her coffee herself; the bays, under Hugh's Jehuship, deposit us at the bottom of the flight of steps at Wentworth hall door, exactly as the clock strikes nine. Nobody is down yet, and I flee along the corridors and lobbies unobserved to my own room, where I lay down on my bed and straightway fall asleep, and forget my troubles, and that nightmare pot-house!

## CHAPTER XX.

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath elsewhere had its setting,  
And cometh from afar."

Is that true? Have we existed in other states of being, as many poets and many non-poets dimly conjecture? Is this life our beginning, though we know it not to be our ending? or is it only one of a series of existences through which we pass? Now and then



flashing reminiscences — reminiscences of things we know positively not to have happened in this life — dart across our minds, recognition in a smell or a sound of something we have met with, something we have had to do with — somehow, somewhere, some-when. Whence can such reminiscences, such recognitions come, but from some pre-existence? Our draught of Lethe has not been quite deep enough.

But even without those dim hintings at recollections of a former state, our utter forgetfulness of ever having been in life, under any form before our present one, is no argument against the existence of such a previous life; for what faintest remembrance have we of our first year? Does any glimmering of memory illumine those days when we lay on our nurse's lap, sprawling, making faces, sucking?

Are there only a certain number of old souls which continually go in and out of an ever new succession of bodies? And if we did exist in some former state, was it a higher or a lower one? Were we beasts or angels? Have we fallen or risen?

There is no light whatever on the past. Thank God there is in the Future enough to enable us to walk soberly, heedfully, warily, on towards the fuller light, which will dawn on us on that —

“Marge beyond the tomb.”

Southey, in his “Doctor,” makes his hero maintain, half in jest and half in earnest, that he was able to recognize, in the personal appearance, habits and dispositions of many of those around him, the different animals which, in a former state, their spirits had inhabited.



Truly, there is none of us who cannot point out a pig or two, a sheep or a mule, among his acquaintance. If Dolly had ever pre-existed, it must have been in the shape of one of the feline tribe; not a comfortable old tabby sitting staid beside the hearth, and putting up her head to be tickled, but a tigress or a panther, sleek, lithe, beautiful, stealthy. There lacked to her but the eyed skin, the outward beast form; her spirit had retained the pard-spirit of her former life, when she lived in jungles — tangled, torrid swamps, and lay in wait to pounce on deer, and kid, and man.

Turning day into night, I slept on till the afternoon, till the sun came round to my side of the house, and woke me, blazing down hot and full on the bed whereon I lay, through the uncurtained, unshuttered windows. When I did wake, it was to the consciousness of a sufficiently bad headache. For some little time I lay motionless, on the border land between sleeping and waking; feeling nothing much, wishing nothing much, thinking of nothing much except myself as a mere animal; my headache, my vertigo, and my heat. I was fully roused at length by the door handle turning softly, the door opening, and some one coming in. Some one came over to the bed and bent over me; that some one was Dolly.

“Awake, are you? have you quite recovered your adventure?” she says, in a key so sweet and low, that it does not jar on my aching cranium, as almost any other sound would. She would make the divinest sick nurse, would Dolly. My senses come back to me, full and strong. Dolly has treated me despitefully; there shall be no peace with her; war to the knife with



Dolly. I fixed my eyes steadily upon her, from among my tumbled pillows.

"I don't want to speak to you," I said; "you tell lies!"

"Do I?" said Dolly, unruffled. "I dare say; I never yet met a person who did not, and I hope I never shall, for they would necessarily be very disagreeable; a certain amount of fibs is essential to the existence of society; did you never hear that?"

I refuse to be led from the concrete to the abstract.

"You made mischief between me and Dick. You prevented him from driving me to Wilton," I cry, with raised voice, knives running through my head under my exertions.

"If Dick, as you call him, has forgiven me, don't you think you might?" she says, gently.

If Dick had forgiven her! How that quiet implication stung me! I roll my head restlessly from side to side.

"What object could you have had in doing it? Had you any object at all, or was it only pure malice?"

Dolly smiles and sits down on the side of the bed; she perceives we are going to have a squabble, and she does not see why we should not have it out comfortably.

"What a foolish child you were not to get into bed," she says, with affability; "lying down in one's clothes does not rest one in the least; now, you know, to-night you'll look quite green."

"Was it pure malice?" I reiterate, disregarding this digression.



"Nobody but a fiend would think of doing anything out of pure malice, I should say," returns my sister, sedately, "and I'm not a fiend yet, that I know of; malice had neither part nor lot in the matter."

"Did you want to ride with him yourself?" I ask, vehemently; "are *you* fond of him too?"

Dolly smiles again; a little amused, compassionate smile, and shrugs her shoulders.

"Am I given to being fond of men, merely for being long-legged and poor, which, I confess, seem to me the most salient points in your dear Dick's character?"

"Any one would have said you thought he had a good many good points in his character, who saw the way you looked at him yesterday," I cry, choking with indignation.

"My dear, did I make my own eyes? Can I help it, if they have any peculiar way of exercising themselves? Providence made them, and Providence must answer for their vagaries."

"If you have such a contempt for poverty, why did you waste so much time and trouble; why did you tell lies, and make me perfectly miserable, merely to get that which, when you had got it, you thought worthless?" I asked, bitterly.

"My good child, for once I was unselfish; cannot you believe that?" asks Dolly, playfully, and laying her cool slim hand on my burning forehead.

"I had no plans for myself whatever; certainly no designs on our mutual friend, with the crack-jaw Scotch name; it rather bored me than otherwise ambling along beside him, for Heaven knows how many hours, in the broiling sun!"



I am dumbfounded, and lie staring at her with boundless wonder in my wide open eyes.

"What upon earth did you do it for, then?" I gasp, slowly; "once for all, tell me what object you had, or whether you had any?"

"Will you have some Eau de Cologne on your head?" she asks, and as she is sprinkling scented drops over me, "An object?" says she, "yes, to be sure; who but an idiot ever does anything without an object? I have no objection whatever to tell you mine either, if you'll listen to it like a sensible woman, and not scream at the top of your voice, as you have been doing for the last quarter of an hour. If you *must* know the truth, *I* intended you to drive with Sir Hugh. Was not it charitable of me? he looked so disconsolate, poor little wretch!"

"Why did you want me to drive with him?" I ask, in blank astonishment.

"Because, my dear, I wish and intend that you should drive through life with him; because I hope, before I die, to see you Lady Lancaster."

"*That* you never will," I cry, with flaming cheeks, starting up in bed, and fumbling with the counterpane.

"Ah! perhaps not; at present you prefer the idea of riding in the baggage-waggon after Daddy Longlegs, with several little M'Gregors, male and female, clinging about your skirts!"

So Dolly, softly inhaling Eau de Cologne as she speaks. I fling myself back among the pillows, and am thankful for the shade afforded by my loosened hair—a shade which partially veils the blush that I feel creeping all over my body.



"How coarse you are!" I murmur.

"Very likely," says Dolly, "common sense always is coarse; but my being ever so coarse won't make the baggage-waggon an easier mode of conveyance, nor will it pay Romeo and Juliet's butcher's bills."

"What is it to you whether they are ever paid?" I am emboldened by the protection of my tangled locks to ask; "why cannot you let us be happy in our own way?"

"*Us* be happy, indeed!" says Dolly, a little contemptuously. "Are you so sure about Romeo? because I'm not; Romeo likes coats from Poole; he likes billiards and Château Lafitte, and actresses; of course he does; he keeps them in the background now; but you are even a greater ninny than I take you for, if you cannot believe that they are there, out of sight somewhere. Will he be content, do you suppose, with poky lodgings and a dirty parlour maid, and shoulder of mutton and rice pudding, even with you to sweeten them?"

I writhe in silent anguish; but her logic is unanswerable. What equivalent am I for billiards and Château Lafitte, and actresses?

"It's something quite new your taking such an interest in my concerns," I say presently. "I cannot see what it would matter to you if I were to run away with a tinker."

"I don't think a tinker's arms would quarter well with the Lestranges'," says she, laughing, "and I should not like to have to allude to my sister Madame la Chaudronnière." Then falling into gravity again, "I don't pretend to any great disinterestedness in the matter; my motive for endeavouring to prevent your



marrying Major M'Gregor, is no particularly tender regard for your interests; it is simply this, that by marrying a pauper, as, from all I can make out, I believe our worthy dragoon to be, you will drag down our family, and me of course with it, even lower than it has already fallen, though it seems pretty nearly at the bottom of the ladder as it is."

I toss about restlessly. I feel that there is a flaw somewhere in her worldly wisdom, but I cannot detect it.

"Whereas," pursues Dolly, rising and pacing up the room, "if you marry Sir Hugh —"

"Never!" I cry, interrupting her; "I'd rather be flayed alive! Ugh! married to Hugh! I should be dead of disgust in a week! Faugh!"

Dolly pauses before a cheval-glass, and considers herself — not with vanity — for vanity in her was not, but reflectively, appraisingly; looked at her small snaky head; at her coiled cables of ink-black hair; at her tall, svelte figure.

"Don't you see, you stupid child, that I'm only giving you the advice which I always give and take myself?" she says. "Am I more in love with Hugh's attractions than you are? not I; as I see him, he's a good-natured, wooden-headed old booby; but for all that, if he were to come in here this minute (don't be alarmed, he'd hardly be so ill-mannered) and say to me, 'Miss Lestrangle, will you marry me?' or, 'Dolly, will you be mine?' wouldn't I respond, 'Yes, dear Hugh, *that* I will, and thank you kindly.' I'd swear to love, honour, and obey, not *him*, not *him* (with a gesture of contempt), but his £ 12,000 a year, his



French cook, and his opera-box, and I'd keep my vow, too!"

"I wish to goodness he *would* ask you!" I groan.

"Is there," pursues Dolly, warming with her theme (it's not often she thinks it worth while wasting so much breath on anything female), "is there any old lord between the three seas, so old, so mumbling, so wicked, that I would not joyfully throw myself into his horrid palsied old arms, if he had but money; money! money! money is power; money is a god!"

I sit with my legs dangling over the side of the bed listening.

"It may be yours," I say; "it is not mine. What do women want with power? What would they do with it when they had got it? Love is worth all the power in the world!"

"Pooh! I did not know that any one after sixteen or before sixty, believed in that venerable old imposture now-a-days; love is another name for selfishness!" says Dolly, recommencing her walk, and sweeping up and down.

"It cannot be selfishness to live altogether in and for another person," object I, thinking that I have nailed her there.

"Worldly wisdom and sordid common sense," continues she, "would make you marry Hugh, sacrifice your own passions, give a lift to the poor old family, the depression of which is breaking papa's heart — it's a pity you've always made such a fuss about your devotion to him, isn't it — and relieve him of more than half his cares; on the other hand, *Love*, noble, beautiful, be-poetized *Love*, will make you hurl yourself at the not particularly delighted head of that big



Scotchman — you will have no money, no position, no power for good or evil, but your passion will be gratified; you will be put in possession of that very luxuriant moustache, and those very broad shoulders, and having them, you can afford to let papa's 'grey hairs go down with sorrow to the grave,' as somebody's in the Bible did; cannot you, dear?"

She opens the door and passes out; I call after her, "Dolly, Dolly, come back!" but she either does not or will not hear.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"MACBETH has murdered sleep!" and Dolly had murdered mine. Much good to shake up the pillows, to smooth the coverlet, and, turning round, compose oneself resolutely to the continuation of one's unfinished snooze; much good to think of a key, or the wards of a lock, or the legs of a chair, or anything else as intensely unexciting.

I am Orestes, and Dolly has hounded on the Erinnyes on my track. My Furies are — like the original ones that pursued Orestes, — three in number, viz.: Dick's poverty, as impeding our union, and docking his luxuries (of which I grudged him but one item), not as affecting myself, for from my youth up I had been hard up, and should not have known what it felt like to be otherwise; Dick's jealousy of Hugh, and Dick's flirtation with Dolly.

I had not sense enough to see that I need not worry myself about all three at once; since any two of them were exclusive of the third, as for example, that



if Dick was going to jilt me, his want of money would in nowise prejudice me: be rather a matter of rejoicing, — or, that if Dick was jealous of Hugh, he was the less likely to be in love with Dolly.

All three of them, Megæra, Tisiphone, and Alecto, crowd their ugly faces round, and grin at me, and I have not strength to combat them.

After about a quarter of an hour, which seems to me about two full hours, I jump up. I have no watch, as you know, but I hear a clock ticking on the landing outside. I open the door, and peep out. Only five o'clock! An hour and a half till dressing time! I will go down. Fortune favours the brave, and I suppose also the fair, as they are mostly put in the same category, and I *might* meet Dick in the passages, or the stairs, in the billiard-room; as Christabel says, "All may yet be well!" (though that is rather an ill-omened quotation, for all was not well in *her* case), and at the worst, the society of my fellow-creatures, even though they are not *Dicks*, is pleasanter than my own.

At the morning-room door I stop and listen; not with any eaves-dropping intention, but simply to try and detect those tones that I foolishly imagine would wake me, "Had I lain for a century dead!" Laid for a century dead indeed! It is all very well, and a pretty conceit to say so in a love song, but it will require a louder than human voice to re-form those scattered dust particles into the marvellous image, of which the great God Himself condescended to be the model.

The tones I seek are not detectable; I hear instead ever so many women's voices; young and old, croaky and mellow. Nearly all the women, half of the Went-



worth party, are scattered about the many cornered room, in groups of twos and threes. Each is provided with a cup of tea, and all have apparently just come in from walking; judging by the large show of Mrs. Heaths' and Mrs. Browns' hats that are lying about, and by the display of a great many pairs of trimmest Balmorals. Lady Capel (the fat viscountess) stands by the table, in a charming little point-lace bonnet, chatting with Miss Seymour. I think it makes her feel comfortable to look at anything so thin.

She has had the post of honour this afternoon; and has been out driving with Lady Lancaster in the sociable. Honour and pleasure are not Siamese twins in this world. Our hostess also bonneted (in the literal and not metaphorical sense), is *button-holeing* another philanthropic old woman, on the subject of the Shoe Black Brigade. As I come in, she turns round and utters an exclamation of surprise, "Come down after all! So glad! Your sister gave us such a sad account of you, that we were afraid we were going to lose you for all the evening; there does not seem much the matter now, does there?" patting my cheek as she would have patted the cheek of the Hottentot Venus, if Sir Hugh had seen fit to throw his Sultanic Majesty's pocket-handkerchief to her.

"You are quite a heroine, my dear!" says Lady Capel kindly, "we are all dying to hear your version of this unlucky *contre-temps*!"

"Men are so stupid!" cries the sharp young lady, whose name is Miss Gifford, coming over from the other side of the room; "they never know how to tell a story; they always leave out all the details, which are the most important parts."



"It must have been a great shock, and — *very* embarrassing," says Miss Seymour, in that whiny-piny voice, with which an inscrutable Providence has seen fit to visit her.

"I should have put on my seven-league boots, and set off walking home!" says Miss Gifford smartly. She would have done nothing of the kind, as indeed she would have given all her back hair, and two or three of her fingers for a six or seven hours' nocturnal *tête-à-tête* with Sir Hugh.

"It was very fortunate that it was not one of the other young men," says Lady Lancaster, stiffly; "it certainly was a trying position for a young woman to be placed in; and you could not have found yourself in better hands than my son's."

I receive this assurance in silence, and bite my lips. Perceiving that I am *pro tem.* a small lion, and am expected to roar in my humble way, I execute a slight *mugissement*. "I don't know much about it, except that the horses were frightened at the train — they had been rather frisky all along, I thought — and then they ran away, and upset me into the hedge bank. I don't know where they upset anybody else, and then I suppose I fainted, for I don't recollect anything else, until I woke up in that inn-parlour. Ugh!" (with a shiver of aversion at the remembrance.)

"Poor child, it must have been very disagreeable!" Lady Capel says good-naturedly. Fat women mostly are good-natured, whether it is a cause or an effect I cannot say.

"Dreadful!" I answer, emphatically, "I never was so miserable in my life!" Lady Lancaster takes my emphasized remark as a personal affront.



"You should have been very thankful, my dear, that your life was spared," she says, rather rebukingly, "and that you were with a person who would be sure to take such excellent care of you!"

"What on earth did you do all those hours?" puts in Miss Gifford, rather quickly, to save us a sermon, "talk, or go to sleep, or play picquet! oh, I suppose they had not such a thing as a pack of cards in the house, had they?"

"I looked at Sir Hugh's watch half the time, and read an awful book about the End of the World, and the Third Vial the other half," I answer, rather grimly.

They all laugh except Lady Lancaster.

"What a picture!" "How wretched!" "I cannot imagine anything more dreary!" "And what did Sir Hugh read? Drelincourt on Death?" (this is from Miss Gifford).

"He read nothing!"

"Poor man! he was worse off than you even; how did he amuse himself then? smoked? took a nap?"

"He did nothing, he sat quiet."

"You don't seem to have been very sociable," remarks Miss Gifford, with sprightliness, "nor to have taken much pains to entertain one another."

My thoughts fly back to poor Hugh's well meant efforts to entertain me, and I feel myself blushing.

"Did nobody miss us?" I ask, hastily, fiddling with my tea cup: "was no one ever coming to look for us?"

"Oh, I believe there were people hunting for you all over the country half the night, only they did not manage to find you somehow; weren't there Lady Lancaster?"

"They went the wrong road," replies our hostess,



sitting very upright, and looking over her spectacles: "that was how the mistake arose. Hugh never was known to come by that lower road in his life before. It is three miles longer too; I cannot imagine what possessed him."

I *can* imagine, and I dive under the table after an imaginary pocket-handkerchief.

"Aren't you very much shaken and bruised?" asks Miss Seymour, making up her face into a sympathetic shape.

"Oh, yes! I'm black and blue from top to toe."

"My dear child! why did not you say so before?" says Lady Lancaster, very kindly, though fussily, as 'tis her nature to, "and I would have sent my maid with some arnica for you; it's the best thing in the world for contusions and sprains, and anything of that sort. I'm afraid, dear, that if you are so stiff and sore, you will not be equal to much dancing to-night."

"Dancing!" repeat I, pricking up my ears, as a horse does, when in the distance he hears the horn and the hounds giving tongue.

"Haven't you heard of it?" says Lady Capel: "why, we have all been on the *qui vive* all day about it. We have been making decorations, and hanging up flags and standing on step-ladders ever since breakfast, haven't we?"

My thoughts revert to my one ball, and Captain Dashwood, who has become a very hazy mist figure of late. He was a "heavy" too. I seem fated to be the prey of the Cavalry.

"We are not very dancing people generally," Lady Lancaster says in her stately, slow way: "it is many years since there was a ball in this house. It was



quite a sudden thought, but my son thought perhaps it would amuse the young people."

"How very kind of him," I say, very gratefully, while my eyes begin to shine like carriage lamps.

"It is quite a small affair! only nine or ten couples, but everybody is in town."

Lady Capel sighs. Fain, fain would she be there too, but the Newmarket Stud, and a long course of point-lace bonnets have necessitated the letting of the Capellian mansion in Park Lane this season.

"Small impromptu dances are always the pleasantest," she says politely, "the only thing is that in the country gentlemen are not to be had for love or money."

"It is indeed very true!" says Lady Lancaster, shaking her head, and her marabout feathers with it, as solemnly as if it had been *question* of the famine in India. "The young men of the present day cannot be content to stay at home and look after their properties; they must be running about to Egypt and Palestine, and half a dozen other places that they never thought of in my younger days" (very likely not, for it took eighteen months to get to India in her younger days).

"I consider that it's quite one of the greatest evils of this generation! one of the signs of the latter days!"

"A very unpleasant sign!" think I, if it is to entail a Spurgeonic dance on me this evening. Lady Capel sees my countenance falling.

"You need not be afraid of lacking partners," she says, nodding to me; "for I heard Sir Hugh saying that he had invited a number of the Scots Greys over from Nantford."

"My son is a host in himself," says Lady Lancaster; "he is a very energetic dancer!"



There is nothing, from the writing a book on the Differential Calculus to making cabbage nets, that "my son" cannot do in his mother's opinion.

"How many are we in the house?" says Miss Gifford, counting. "Sir Hugh, one, Lord Capel, two. Does *he* dance, Lady Capel?"

"When he is wanted; he does not think it fair to stand in the young men's light!"

The dressing bell rings.

"Dear me! I had no idea that it was so late!"

"We dine at seven to-day," says Lady Lancaster, explanatorily; and then we all separate to make ourselves beautiful for the Scots Greys.

## CHAPTER XXII.

WE are to dance in the dining-room; the hall has a stone floor, and Lady Lancaster objects to the dismantling of any of the other rooms; consequently we are to dine in the hall. Lady Lancaster makes many apologies to us; hopes we don't mind, but we must be prepared to rough it a little, which means that we are to eat a first rate Russian dinner, and drink unexceptionable wines half an hour earlier than usual, and in a different but equally comfortable room to that in which we usually feast.

Blessed! for ever blessed! be the manner and custom which compels the host to take the woman of highest rank in to dinner. In no company more exalted than that to be found in an almshouse, or a charity school, am I likely to be the woman of highest rank, so for once, I escape Hugh. Though he manœuvres to have me on his other side, I counter-manœuvre and



more successfully to avoid him. Fate assigns me the young gentleman with the death's-head studs, Mr. De Laney, an artless child, who helps to make the British Grenadier,

"The terror of the Umbrian,  
The terror of the Gaul,"

and who prattles away to me about Windsor and Canada, and muffins, and skating on the Rink, and shooting Cariboo. Dick is on the same side of the table, further down. By leaning back in my chair, and peeping behind my guardsman, the widow, the sceptic, and Miss Gifford, I catch a glimpse of a broad-cloth back, and a yellow love lock or two; he has been dipping his head in cold water, apparently, for it is curling more furiously than ever. But neither a man's back-hair nor his back afford much insight into the state of his temper and feelings. I certainly neither lived to eat, nor ate to live that day; great excitement is utterly exclusive of hunger.

"No, thanks! no, thanks! no, thanks!" say I again and again, as gorgeous gentlemen in plush and calves, poke fish and flesh, and fowl, in every appetizing disguise under my nose.

"Are you a Catholic, Miss Lestrangle?" asks my little boy at last. He is not a bad little boy; cheery and equally ready for a Fenian invasion, and a valse with a pretty girl.

"No; why?" ask I, opening my big eyes.

"Because it seems to be a Fast Day with you, and it is Wednesday, so I thought you must be a Holy Roman."

I laugh a little.

"No; only I'm not hungry."



"I'm afraid you are seedy."

"No, I am not."

"Dancing is very hard work; one requires a great deal of support to stand it at all!" with a grin on his jolly wide mouth, and he acts as if he believed what he said. Not even our brave defenders can eat for ever, however; about ten o'clock we are most of us gathered in the drawing-room. The men are struggling into their gloves; one, who pretends that he takes ladies' size, has burst one pair, and is on the eve of bursting a second; two or three of the youngest and conceitedest have retired to endue fresh ties. Carriages are beginning to be heard; the Coxes are the first to arrive. Horses next door to thorough-bred, that must not be kept standing one second; a coat of arms as big as a dinner-plate on each panel; cockaded servants, (for Mr. Coxe is a volunteer, and inexpressibly laughable the podgy little millionaire looks going through the goose-step, and shouldering arms, in his invisible green uniform;) this is the way in which the British tradesman visits his friends in these happy days.

Mr. and Mrs. Coxe make their entry *arm-in-arm*, and as they are both fat kine, they have some difficulty in getting through the door. Mr. Coxe has on that crimson velvet waistcoat, from which not all the prayers, tears, and entreaties of his wife and daughters can avail to divorce him. Behind the parent birds come the pullets and cockerel; Mortimer Spencer De Lacy Coxe, Gentleman Commoner at Oxford, with his name down for Boodle's, the "Junior Conservative," and half a dozen other crack Clubs, but of the shop, shoppy, with his sister Amaryllis and the rear brought up by Lily, who has the highest colour, and Violet,



who has the loudest voice in A — — shire. Lady Lancaster in her pearl-gray satin — Mrs. Coxe's pink moire-antique cost just as much a yard, but it has not the same imposing effect, — rises and says very majestically, "How do you do, Mrs. Coxe?" It is the first time that the Coxes have been within the doors of Wentworth, and I think for a minute or two they wish themselves well out of them again.

Despite my distaste for old women, I cannot help admiring the old lady. She is like an old queen receiving a deputation from some of her faithful burgesses. She is a tiresome old woman, and teases one's life out about the Zulu Indians and the Millennium and "my son," but she is a lady to the backbone. Coxes may buy up the old houses and the poor old lands, and almost the old pedigrees, but they cannot buy the "grand air." Hugh has not got the grand air, but he has a very good-natured air, which has more the knack of making people feel comfortable than his mother's grand one.

"D'ye do, Miss Coxe? very glad to see you! D'ye do, Miss Lily? I hope you feel equal to a great deal of exercise to-night, for we don't intend to let you go home till this time to-morrow." Then the Scots Greys arrive in their drag; half-a-dozen of them come herding into the room knowing no one, and hanging together like a swarm of bees.

Hugh takes them up, and presents them to his parent, who shakes hands with the Colonel, and executes a magnificent reverence to the others, which reverence frightens one cornet of a timid disposition and tender years nearly into fits.

Then the arrivals come thick and fast; people who



do not go to town at all; and people whose purses are only equal to a month or six weeks at the height of the season, and who consequently have not taken flight yet. Papa and mamma, boys and girls, here they all are.

About half-past ten, Sir Hugh gives Lady Capel his arm, and leads her to the dancing-room; each man chooses the woman he loves, or the woman to whom he has just been introduced, or the woman whose father has asked him to dinner, and we all troop after him.

I don't wish to see a more cheery scene than the Wentworth dining-room — transmogrified with pink calico and union jacks, and wreaths of evergreens and flowers, till it hardly knows itself — presented that evening, just before the dancing commenced, when the waxlights — becomingest of lights — were all lit and blazing softly, mellowly, from their sconces along the walls where dresses were rustling gently, and there was a buzz of talking; when the hook-nosed chaperones, (why, I wonder, do the noses of most British matrons at a certain period become hooks?) in their many coloured silks and satins were settling down on their benches like a flock of brilliant but venerable tropical birds, contented with the prospect of an evening of vicarious enjoyment, and looking forward with trusting faith to the supper hour; when all the girls, with one or two hopeless exceptions, were looking pretty, and when the fiddlers were tuning up and causing their instruments to emit queer little squeaks, discordant prelude to a harmonious after-piece. My faithful Grenadier boy has bidden me for the first dance, which turns out to be a quadrille, rather to his disgust.



"I did not mean to ask you for one of those stupid square things!" he says, "it's the worst compliment you can pay a woman to ask her for a quadrille!"

"For the *last* quadrille," I say, laughing. "You have not done that at all events!"

Sir Hugh has been rushing about wildly, saying a civil thing to each of the old women, and making good-humoured jokes to a percentage of the girls; now he comes up to me, where I sit on a scarlet bench alone.

"You are engaged for this next valse, *of course?*"

"Yes."

"Is not it anybody that you can cut?"

"Oh, no! no!"

"Give me the next then, won't you? we have made it up, haven't we?"

"I did not know that we had ever quarrelled!"

"All right then; *mind* you keep it for me."

He writes his name on my card, as men always do write on these occasions, so that no human being could decipher it, and then rushes back to his duties. I told Sir Hugh a fib; I am not engaged for the next dance. Several people have asked me for it, but I have told the same fib to them all; I am keeping it for one who does not seem inclined to come and claim it. There is a little pause between the two dances; a little lull between two pleasant storms; people seem to be shaking up together very comfortably. The strange warriors have made acquaintance with some of the native women, and are exchanging beads and looking-glasses.

The Miss Coxes are in great request; Miss Violet — such a jolly girl! it does not in the least matter what you say to her — is holding a little court near



the door, well away from Lady Lancaster; her *bon mots* do not reach me, but the applause that follows them does. Close to me, the young man with the catarrh is coughing noisily; his cold has taken a new turn; he can pronounce his M's and N's, but he has purchased that power at the expense of as roaring a cough, as the poor lady's in the epitaph.

"If you would but try jujubes," I hear Miss Seymour saying, with feeling.

"No good at all!" replies the sufferer, huskily. "I've eaten a box and a half already."

He seems very sorry indeed for himself as men always do, if they have a finger ache.

"Go to bye-bye, my dear fellow, I advise!" says little De Laney, heartlessly; "put your feet in gruel and drink hot water, and you'll be all serene to-morrow morning."

The invalid looks cross, and mutters something about its being all very fine.

"Not fine at all! if you intend going on barking that way all the evening, for you'll drown the band," and then he goes off laughing.

"I'm afraid you'll think me a very fidgetty old woman," says Lady Lancaster to a young matron, who has inadvertently placed herself near an open window, "but aren't you a little imprudent to be sitting in such a thorough draught? nothing so likely to give cold; we old people have learnt by bitter experience you know, particularly when *décolleté* too ——"

I hear no more, for the band clashes out; big fiddle and little fiddle, harp and bones, off they go. There is a movement among the company; non-dancers



clearing out of the way, men looking for their partners.

My heart begins to beat so fast, that I feel choking. "Perhaps he cannot see me where I am sitting." I stand up, and push gently forwards into the front of the circle forming round the dancers, while my legs tremble under me.

The ice is broken; one adventurous couple has set off on their course of insane gyrations, quickly followed by another and another, till the whole room is filled with whirling clouds of tulle and tarletan, enveloped in which, manly legs vanish to re-appear meteor-like for an instant and then be swallowed up more completely than before. I dig my fingers into my poor bruised arm, and don't feel the pain I am inflicting on myself one bit. "Won't he come? won't he come? Oh, how cruel he is!" Suddenly an opening is made in the spectators, to admit a fresh couple, *such* a handsome couple.

"Hallo! how's this?" cries Hugh, coming up behind, "has your partner forgotten you?"

"I — I believe so," with my lips trembling.

"Never mind, there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it; you'll have to put up with me, after all."

"Oh, no! no!" I cry, turning my shoulder to him; "I don't want, please not."

Sir Hugh is rather obtuse.

"*You* a wallflower of all people! couldn't think of such a thing."

I have not spirit to resist further, nor can I trust my voice, so we join the whirl, and whirl too. Hugh dances well; does it with all his heart, and mind, and



soul, and strength, as he does everything he puts his hand to — the great secret of his happy, cheery life is, that he never does anything by halves. I get giddy at last, so we stop and watch our neighbours spinning away like so many peg-tops, to the sound of "Il Bacio."

Some dance in time; some dance out; some dance hoppily, like parched peas; some dance smoothly; some go jog trotting along, like old cart horses to market; some go racing pace. Amaryllis Coxe and a long gawky, all arms and legs, come floundering into us.

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I hope I did no harm." Then lumber off again; hobble-de-gee, hobble-de-gee. Another couple passes us; racers these; and I bite my lip till it bleeds, as I look after them. Dolly in maize tulle, and pomegranates in her hair; smooth cheeks like living rose leaves; her scarlet lips half apart, is floating down the long room, lying restfully in Dick's arms, with her head on his shoulder. Dolly has a most reprehensible style of dancing, *I* think, though Dick does not seem to think so, as they swim fleetly round, with the most complete agreement in their supple movements. Dolly is the sort of woman upon whom Mr. Algernon Swinburne would write pages of magnificent uncleanness.

"Where were we this time last night, eh?" roars Hugh, sentimentally, for we are close to the recess where the band is placed.

"I'm rested!" I say, abruptly; *I cannot* stand any tender reminiscences. So that dance ends, and another and another follow quickly.

The patient chaperones sit biding their time, like a row of old hens roosting in a hen house, with here



and there a superannuated chanticleer crowing feebly to enliven them. A knot of men hang about the door, talking *horsily* and *doggily*, and fling out a careless word of commendation in the equine tongue, as some filly, more promising than ordinary, flies by, wafting twenty yards of tulle against their faces.

"Why aren't you taking a more active part in these gay doings?" asks the naughty old gentleman, who is known amongst men by the name of Sir Phillip Leroy to the widowed Mrs. Marryat, who has effected an ingenious compromise between the memory of the enskied one, and the desire not to let grief be too disfiguring in the eyes of his successor in *posse*, by a judicious combination of the funeral black and the bridal white in her attire.

"*I!* Oh, no! no!" with a glance at her black dress, and a sigh.

"Perhaps" (letting himself gently down on the bench beside her), "perhaps you object to the pleasant knocking down of old-fashioned barriers in the present style of dancing; it certainly is what would have been called in *our* younger days, —— (How to write a whisper), don't you think so?"

"Take care! take care! somebody will hear you."

I have been guiding heavy youths who *would* give their left hand, when they ought to give their right, and their right hand when they ought to give their left, through the labyrinth of the Lancers, and the mazes of the gay quadrille. Men seem to like fern wreaths, and red heads, and ignorance. It is quite a new light to myself that I am a beauty, but I am so fortunate as to overhear that the bay filly is considered quite one of the best things out. I have been scamper-



ing round the room with almost every man in it, with one melancholy exception.

Dick has been scampering largely too; with the three Miss Coxes, of course; a quadrille with Mrs. Coxe — who makes her steps and chassé's, as the world chasséd in the days when she was Miss Martha Harris — with Miss Gifford, Miss Seymour, and half a dozen other Misses; then again with Dolly.

"I so seldom meet anyone whose step suits mine; it is such a treat!" I hear Dolly saying very softly, while she looks at him as I fancy Delilah looked at Samson, when she tried to wile the secret of his strength from him. Dolly reminds me of

"The maid of Cassivelaun,  
Whom Gwydion made by glamour out of flowers."

"Sandy! The canny Scot! Daddy Longlegs!" say I to myself indignantly, recalling all the ignominious epithets that she had heaped on the man, at whom she is now looking with the eyes of a hundred "Laises" rolled into one. Oh, if I could but tell him! How I wish that she had had the small-pox in her youth; she might have been a good, worthy, useful woman then; making flannel waistcoats for poor people; wheeling the old dad's chair to the fire for him, and being my confidant.

The room is getting so hot; too much of a good thing is as undesirable as a little of a bad one. The smell of the gilly-flowers and roses is getting past a joke; it makes one's head ache and one almost wishes to exchange it for a little bonedust or guano. Some one — a young person — opens a window, and some one — an old person, Lady Lancaster, I think it is — shuts it again. Lady Lancaster has that rooted



aversion to fresh air which characterized the last generation.

The girls fan themselves vigorously, and the men mop their foreheads, and a whisper goes through the room that the door of the supper-room is open. Unhappy Patres Conscripti who have been dragged hither at their wives' "chariot wheels," begin to console themselves with the reflection that their sufferings are at all events half over.

"Come, Capel, you lazy beggar!" says Sir Hugh coming up, and tapping that ornament to the Peerage on the back; "why don't you make yourself of some use? take one of those old girls down to supper with you; oh, yes, there is Mrs. Coxe; take her; won't she 'my lord' you!"

"What, that female Daniel Lambert! No, no, my good fellow; it makes one hot to look at her; and I'm 92 in the shade, as it is!"

However, he obeys, and others go and do likewise. Dowager after dowager sweeps by to receive the reward of her faith. The musicians retire to refresh themselves, and I need hardly say that the man who plays the bones gets drunk.

"Been to supper?" asks Hugh, who is conveying one of the first detachment back again.

I have freed myself from all my admirers, and am sitting in a humped-up, disconsolate attitude like a fowl on a wet day.

"No, I don't want any!" looking down uneasily, and plucking at the wooden bracelet that adorns my left wrist.

"Oh, nonsense! we must have half a dozen more spins by-and-by. I have got through all my duty



dances, and you'll never be up to them without lots of champagne; we mustn't let her starve herself, must we, mother?"

Mother waggles her old head, while the family diamonds (even *they* don't render me unfaithful to Dick) make a restless light on her withered neck, and says, "No, indeed!" she is always an advocate for a good deal of nourishment for young people.

For the second time, I am vanquished, and am walked off to the supper-room, where I find my fellow creatures like cattle before rain —

"Forty feeding like one;"

and where I am compelled to swallow chicken and tongue that sticks in my throat, and champagne that is of all drinks the one most abhorrent to me. The evening wears on, with no improvement in my circumstances.

I get so weary at last of the everlasting "tum te tum! tum te tum!" The room is getting strewn with long strips and fragments of gauze and tulle; and the garlands flag and droop. The girls' hair is getting loosened, and their complexions red and flushed; all the freshness is gone from their faces and their toilettes. There is something of the Bacchante, I always think, in the look of a woman at the end of a hard fought ball; the men wear better, but they look rather limp too, and inclined, like La Motte Fouqué's "Ondine," to melt away into running brooks.

"That's in honour of me!" says little De Laney, as the "Guards' Waltz" peals out, and we prepare to embark on it, "a very pretty compliment of Lancaster's, isn't it?"



"You are like the man that got up and bowed, when the people cheered the king as he came into the theatre," I say laughing, for there is something contagious about light-heartedness.

"Who's the girl in the blue top knot; one would have to have a piece added on to one's arm, before one could hope to get round *her* waist."

"Miss Coxe."

"Any relation to the Army Agent, because if so, I would ask her to put in a good word for me with her papa."

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"One struggle more and she'll be free, whoever she is."

Amaryllis is candour and generosity's self in the display of her anatomy. One faint gleam of hope comes to me that evening; but it is like the little yellow glimmer of light that comes out on a hillside in wintry weather, no sooner seen than swallowed up again in the dull murkiness. I am dancing a quadrille, with that everlasting, excellent, intolerable Hugh; and Dick, very much against his will, is my *vis-à-vis*. We meet in the dance; "What on earth *have* I done?" I say with tears in my voice, and throwing all my eager soul into my misty blue eyes, as I look up in his dear, sulky patrician face. He glances down at me doubtfully, half inclined to be modified.

"Now, Miss Nelly! now, Miss Nelly!" (how enraging to be called "Miss Nelly") "what are you thinking about? we ought to have been half through this figure by now!" cries Sir Hugh, catching hold of my hand, and the opportunity that looked so promising is lost. It is a mistake to suppose that it is the wicked that make this world



such a sad and weary place — it is the good, blundering, dunderheads! “How our wishes do mock us!” I think to myself, as I follow Lady Lancaster and her sleepy covey up the broad shallow staircase to bed. “I should have thought that to meet Dick at a ball was the acmé of human happiness, and now —”

I wake next morning stiff as a doll that refuses to bend anywhere but in the middle, and with great difficulty there; with my head feeling like a ton of lead, and my eyes swelled to the size of well grown walnuts.

“What an object!” cries Dolly, lifting up her slim hands, as she comes into my room, in an innocent-looking white *peignoir*, looking as fresh as a daisy. “Rachel weeping for her children! Charlotte at the tomb of Werther! Agrippina over the urn of somebody! I thought how it would be, so I came to see.”

“You’ll — you’ll be the death of me, Dolly,” I say whimpering, “and — and then you’ll be sorry!”

“The jury will bring it in *felo de se*, I think!” says Dolly, tripping daintily across to the window, and pulling up the blinds, the better to examine into the condition of my countenance. “Good Heavens! child: you are worse than I thought; not all the Eau de Cologne, and rouge and pearl powder in England could make you presentable; you would defy Madame Rachel; you must not attempt to go downstairs.”

“I don’t mean to!” I say, sobbing! “you shall have it all your own way. Go and tell him some more *lies* about me, and I’ll st—st—stay up here, and — and die!”



## CHAPTER XXIII.

I WENT dinnerless that day at Wentworth, — a thing that even in deepest grief one is seldom willing to do: dinnerless, unless the cud of sour and bitter thoughts which I chewed might pass for the festive meal that forms the nucleus of day's dearest interests in most people's lives. Nor did I appear at all till the evening was well on towards ten o'clock. If I had listened to the voice of nature, I should not have appeared at all, but should have retired straightway to bed, and paid the consideration that was due to it, to my most painful occiput. But then we were to leave Wentworth next day, and I could not afford to lose my last chance of reconciliation with Dick.

At all risks, at the risk of my head splitting in two, I must go down to keep a watch upon the wily Dorothea's movements. So I rose, and bathed my cheeks with fresh water, whereby they became and remained as red as the new pulpit cushions in Lestrange Church; I twisted up my hair, and crowned it with a bush of ivy, put on a white frock, girded myself with a rosy sash, and went down.

I stole into the bilious drawing-room, in a mouse-like manner, in the wake of a brace of giant footmen, bearing tea, nor did any one perceive my modest entry. Three-fourths of the party were, I found, tightly packed round a table, employed in one of the most senseless modes of wasting time that man (ingenious in frittering away his little day) has ever invented — a round game.

All were speaking at the utmost pitch of their



voices, and laughing with all the force of their lungs. Some were squabbling over counters, some were making œillades behind clubs and spades and diamonds, some were facetiously trying to cheat, and others were getting cross with them for so trying.

Every man spoke, and no man listened. Surely, surely, ombre and quadrille and brag must have been more delectable games than their posterity, commerce and chow-chow, or they never could have seduced the Lady Betty Modishes, Lady Bridgets, and Lady Annes, into keeping such rakish hours, and indulging such naughty passions for their sakes, as we are led by the "Spectator" to suppose they did.

"Sympathy, or antipathy?" says Sir Hugh, in his stentor's voice, interrogatively, to the sharp young lady beside him.

"Oh, antipathy!" she answers, venomously; "I always say antipathy; it pays much the best, I find."

"I like sympathy best; don't you?" sighs Miss Seymour, to a very Anglican young divine, who is beaming over his barnacles, pastorally at her, and her lean collar bones.

"Six upon sympathy!"

"Six upon antipathy!"

"Six upon sympathy!"

"You owe me thirty-six."

"How do you make that out?"

"Have 'rouge et noir,' Sir Hugh!"

"Do! it's such fun."

"No, no, *have* blind hookey!"

"No, pips!"

"Take my advice, Lancaster, don't have pips! dealer always loses."



Such, and many similar ejaculations, uttered simultaneously, in keys varying from *forte* to *fortissimo*, assail my mazed ears. Dick is not among them, Dolly is; Miss Lestrangle is off guard; she is a little out of her reckoning, and is enjoying a false security, under the impression that I am tossing in anguish on a bed of pain up-stairs, out of the way of handsome paupers.

She is no longer the shrewd, worldly-wise woman of two hours ago, whose sentiments might have been those of a French Marquise of fifty, *temp.* Louise Quinze, but could hardly have belonged to any one younger or less world-polluted. She is transformed into the innocentest, childishest Marguerite; one could well fancy her picking the daisy petals to pieces to find out whether her lover loved her *un peu, passionné-ment*, or *point du tout*.

The guiltless author of this metamorphosis was a very young cotton lord, with a fleshy nose, and a retreating chin, who was willing enough to be Faust; willing, though not eager, because no young gentleman that is a real young gentleman, ever is eager about anything now-a-days.

Dolly's whole infantine soul was immersed in her miniature speculations; her soft cheeks were flushing shyly, and the full pink lips, and the velvet eyes, were saying, with a triumph of simplicity, "I should like always to be your partner, you bring me such good luck." The old game! the old game! it wearies me! But where is Richard? Is he dead, or gone to bed? My eyes roam over the yellow sea, but fail to descry him; then I bethink me of the folding-doors, and the adjoining saloon.



Is that — can it be the top of a human head appearing above the back of an arm-chair, in the dim distance? It is worth investigating. I investigate. The head is Dick's. Dick lying back, holding a book topsy turvy in his hand, and looking as bored and as sulky as any one of Her Majesty's servants need look.

"I came to look for *you* — *Dick!*" I say in a small meek voice, diffidently.

"Indeed! Very good of you, I'm sure!" rising ceremoniously, and trying very hard, but vainly, to be ironical. One must either be, or appear to be, in a good temper, to be successfully ironical.

"I thought I'd come and try to make friends," say I, conciliatorily.

"Have you asked Sir Hugh's leave?" says he, acrimoniously.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

We stand and glare irefully at one another. I cool first. "Oh dear, oh dear! how soon Dolly has turned you against me, poor me!" I cry, plaintively.

"You never were more mistaken in your life; on the contrary, Dol—, your sister, I mean — tried her best to make excuses for you; said you were young and changeable and foolish!"

Who likes being called foolish? none of us mind being called wicked — we take it rather civilly than otherwise; but who does not resent the imputation of folly? "Young and foolish am I?" I cry, at white heat; "and what is she, pray? Would you like to know? Shall I tell you? she's a *mean liar*, that's what she is, there!"

Dick gnaws his moustache savagely; my nervous



English displeases him. "Calling names is very easy," he says, angrily, "blackening another person to white-wash yourself; it's not quite so easy proving your assertions."

I come quite close to him, in my eagerness, and lay a hot white hand on his coat sleeve.

"Is not a liar a person that tells lies?" I ask.

"Of course."

"Well, did not she tell a lie, a villainous black lie, when she told you the day before yesterday that I wanted Hugh to drive me? Don't I hate Hugh? don't I think him the dullest, tiresomest, botheringest, gray-headedest old fogey that ever existed? She knows I do, and you know I do, only you're b—b—bent on breaking my heart."

So I finish with symptoms of imminent whimpering. Exeunt sulks and scowls from my lover's face.

"Is that true, Nell?"

"True! to be sure it is! Am I a liar, like Dolly?"

"On your honour?"

"On my honour."

"On your soul?"

"On my soul."

"You did not want to drive with him? You are *sure*."

"Not I, indeed! I was in such a rage that I would hardly speak to him all the way to Wilton, only he is such a dunderhead that I don't think he perceived it; how *you* ever could have believed such a transparent falsehood, passes my comprehension."

The gray eyes look rather ashamed of themselves, but very much pleased all the same.

"Was it not natural I should think you'd prefer a



rich beggar like him to a poor devil, who has not got two halfpennies to rub together, like me?"

"Does one value one's friends in proportion to the depth of their money bags? If one did, I should have but a poor opinion of myself and my dear old father," I say, gravely.

There comes a fresh burst of maniac mirth from the votaries of chow-chow.

"He's cheating; he's cheating!" "Will you sell your deal?" "I'll give you half-a-crown for it." "Three shillings." "Twelve and ten is twenty-two, I'm up!" "No thanks; I'll stand!" &c., &c.

"Come into the verandah, Nell," says Dick, taking my most willing fingers in his; "we cannot hear each other's voices for this Babel, can we?"

We pass into the verandah upon which the *salon* "gives," to use an Anglicised Gallicism. Roses, red and white; roses, full-blown and over-blown and budding; ruga, with her old-fashioned scented clusters, and her redder sisters, climb and clamber up the wooden trellis work; clematis weaves her tendrils in amongst them, and jessamine stars stud the deep green of ivy leaves. And through creepers and trellis work the moon looks down, benignant and gracious, and large and full, turning the night into a mellow softened feminine day.

She fell full on a beautiful passionate face (not mine, I don't mean), and on a form such as one may fancy those were that wrestled in blue and green on the bloody sand of the arena, before the pitiless Roman world, when (the cruel thumbs being turned down) many a gladiatorial Hercules bit the dust. Good God! how happy I was, lying in his arms, and with the top of my tall wreath scratching his handsome nose.



"I'm a jealous idiot, aren't I, pretty one?" he asks, raining kisses on my lips, thick as leaves in autumn, or the whirling Simois.

"Yes, Dick, I think so."

"You'll never think the same of me again, of course?"

"Oh, no, never!" (shaking my head with solemnity).

"But still, bad as I am, you like me a little bit better than Lancaster?"

"I should like you very little indeed else."

"You little foolish girl! think of preferring me with twopence a year to him with a fine house, and a handle to his name."

"That's just what Dolly says; as you both say the same thing, there must be some truth in it; but it's never too late to mend, is it? The big house and the handle are still within reach, you know. Will you come and see me when I'm Lady Lancaster?"

"No, I'm d—d if I will!"

I see the gray eyes flash in the moonlight at the bare idea of that visit.

"Nelly Lancaster! Eleanor Lancaster! how pretty it sounds!" I cry, pensively, plucking a moon washed rose, and sniffing at it.

Nelly Lestrangle is prettier, and Nelly M'Gregor is prettiest of all, isn't it, darling?" asks Dick, gathering me closer than ever to himself.

"What love is in the moon's eternal eyes  
Leaning unto the earth from out the blissful skies."

Did she look with love at us two poor fools, who, spendthrift-like, were devouring our whole portion of bliss in one half hour; that portion which, spread in a thin layer, over long years, ought to have afforded



us a decent competence during our lives! Silent we stood there, passion-drunk. Did we remember then, in our perfect wonderful satisfaction, who it was that has said "this is not your rest?" The night wind sighs past; it is bearing, perhaps, some weary soul to the land that is very far off; it rocks the heavy-folded roses, and whispers to us some vague sweet tale that we heed not.

"Oh, Dick!" I murmur, "I wish to God I could die now. I shall never, *never* be so happy again!"

Dick shudders through his strong young frame.

"Don't talk of dying, my darling! Your life is only just begun, you poor little child!"

"M'Gregor! M'Gregor! where are you?" sounds the stentor's voice of our worthy host, breaking prosaically on our touching dialogue at this point. "Where the devil is the fellow gone?"

The "fellow" makes no sign; he lies as quiet as a partridge between two turnip ridges. Then a dark head and a body issue from the saloon, and step through the French windows, on to the verandah.

"Oh, you're here, are you?" in a voice of anything but gratification at the discovery.

"Yes, my good fellow; you made such a row over your game, all of you, that we had to come out here for a little peace and quietness — hadn't we?" turning to me, with softened voice, and eyes fondly possessive. I say "yes," and mumble something, in an indistinct manner, about its being late, and going to bed, and — headache, and shuffle off, very red in the face, leaving my two lovers to decide their rival claims to the possession of my person, by single combat, by lots, or by heads and tails, whichever they chose.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHY do I tell my poor little story so circumstantially, I wonder? Will any one care to read it? Is a dissected heart worth looking at, even though it be rather a foolish one? They say that love is the recognizing something of oneself in another person. Will any one, I wonder, recognize in me some of their own foolish fancies and thoughts and notions, and love me for being as silly as themselves, and for owning to them that I am? The old yellow-bodied barouche, and the two victims to spavin and spring-halt, are slowly creeping up "the long back" of a hill; the old coachman is flicking spavin's fat flanks gently with his whip, which that worthy beast does not mind a bit. The sunlight lies patchily on the dusty road; here and there a big tree intercepts it, and holds it in his great branches; a little white-haired child stands at a cottage door eating bread and treacle, and clapping his little brown hands at the horses; bees are buzzing drowsily about straw hives; "wine-dark" auriculas are blowing in the little borders; a woman is feeding a pig. We are going home; Wentworth lies three miles behind us, and I am thinking of the past, and smiling.

How plainly I see that group gathered on the stone steps to bid us God-speed! Lady Lancaster, in a brown silk so stiff and thick that it could well stand by itself, without the support of her ladyship's body inside it, leaning forward to give me a motherly salute (her beard meanwhile pricking me rather), while she says, in her prim old woman's voice —

"I hope we shall see you very often, my dear, *now!*"



Dolly, with one foot on the carriage step, giving a small, smooth lavender hand to Sir Hugh, and saying good-bye to him so softly, as if she was so sorry to part from him; Dick, leaning one great shoulder against the door-post, and smiling a tender, flickering smile under his heavy moustache, and all around a great glory of sunshine, and young green leaves, and blue summer sky. Dick is going to Cork to-day, to join his regiment (happy, happy Cork!); but he is going to write to me, and I am to write to him; is not this brick and mortar enough to build quite a big Spanish castle with? I am so building now as we jog along in the sleepy sunshine.

"My darling! my darling!" I am saying to myself over and over again, like the refrain to a song; "how I love you!" My hands are clasped together in my green cotton cap, and my eyes are looking up to the grand blue dome above, in a great rapture and gratitude and joy. Was it his beauty I loved him for? Should I have loved him so much if he had been little and black and ugly? If his comely looks were to go away from him now, would my love go away too? No, no, *no!* If he were to lose arms and legs, and eyes and nose and ears, he would still be my Dick, my beautiful, strong King Olaf.

In my mind I was drawing a little picture — a little picture with two figures and a dingy background. A bare barrack-room (barrack-rooms were always bare, I imagined, and of course we should not be able to afford lodgings) with no curtain, perhaps, and a bit of drugget in the middle of the floor, and a green baize table-cloth. A good fire though there was in the picture, and an elbow chair beside it; Dick in the



elbow chair in full regimentals (I had an adoration equal to any boarding-school-miss's for

"The pomp and circumstance of glorious war"), and I, on a low stool at his feet, with my arms resting on his knees, looking up alternately at his face and his medals — my hero had three of those insignia — and making little tender speeches to him — speeches that I never hitherto had summoned resolution to utter.

When by myself I was eloquent enough, eloquent as Ulysses or Burke, but when with him the passion of his eyes struck me dumb. It would be different when we were married. I should then be able to speak to him without that shy thrill; should be able to tell him what he was to me; to find words to syllable my great pure love.

Then the scene shifted. Dick was ousted from among the *dramatis personæ*; I reigned in the elbow chair instead; I, dressed simply yet elegantly, holding a levée of officers of every grade and standing in Her Majesty's army; colonels, majors, and captains clustering in reverent admiration around me.

With what modest dignity should I comport myself in my difficult position; with what simple yet spirited answers should I parry their complimentary remarks!

Married at nineteen! How interesting, and like a story-book! Mrs. M'Gregor! Nelly M'Gregor! Major and Mrs. M'Gregor! I would write it down in my blotting book as soon as I got home, to see how it looked.

I suppose my lips moved visibly as I articulated my own and husband's names softly under my breath,



for Dolly, who had not uttered a word before since we left Wentworth, now turned to me — Dolly in a neutral-tinted gauze bonnet, with one blood-red carnation resting on and contrasting her shiny sombre hair; thus she spoke in her harmoniously round, full tones —

“Are you engaged in prayer?”

“No,” said I, rather cross at being roused from my reverie; “why on earth should I be?”

“Your lips were moving, so I thought you might be breathing a short prayer, as people do in the ‘Sunday at Home,’ you know — for me, perhaps.”

“No, I wasn’t,” said I; “I was talking to myself, which is much pleasanter than praying; at least I find it so.” (Merciful God! I don’t think so now!)

I turned my head away, and watched the cloud-shadows travelling swiftly over the green wheat-fields, turning their laughing golden green into dull blue green as they passed; at the blackbirds gobbling cherries in the farm orchards we were driving by.

“Is it thinking of its lover?” pursued the angel in the gauzy bonnet.

“Yes,” said I, briefly, “I am.”

I would not stand any impudence from Dolly any longer, I was resolved. I should soon be a married woman, and able to patronize spinsters all and sundry.

“So it has got its big wax doll after all, has it?” asks she, with a sneer, “curly wig and long legs, and all!”

I am roused to retort. I turn and rend her.

“Sour grapes!” cry I, with red cheeks, and in an elevated key; “don’t you wish we could say —

‘Miss Jenny and Polly  
Had each a new Dolly?’”



Dolly smiled sweetly, but her long sleepy eyes gave one little flash.

"Yes, dear, I do," she said with candour, "only I don't think I should care about playing dolls in a workhouse, which I fear will be your portion."

"I believe you would sell your soul for gold," said I, with my nose in the air, in lofty disdain.

"I certainly would," answered my sister, sedately; "one's soul does not do one much good that I could ever find out. If I could have my body left me, my nice, pretty, pleasant body, with plenty of money to keep it well fed and well dressed, I'd give my soul its *congé* with the greatest *sang froid* imaginable."

I felt feebly shocked at Dolly's sentiments, but too lazily and sovereignly indifferent to what she or her soul said or did to contest the point with her, so we relapsed into silence, and preserved a sort of armed truce, till we reached the rook-haunted old house blinking sleepily from its ivy mantle amid its sunny crofts, with the gray-blue smoke curling straight up into the air from the queer old chimney-stacks.

The library windows at Lestrange look out on the gravelled sweep before the door; small-paned, case-mented windows they are; and as we passed them I leaned forwards eagerly, to blow kisses at my father, whose face I saw leaning out among the roses and the bowery clematis to greet us. What a sad old face it was! What a yellowing tinge — like a sere November leaf's tinge, that spake of waning life and waxing sickness — was stealing over it! Poor noble old face! how often I see you now in my dreams, looking out from among the fresh pink rose-bunches! I ran to my sire with 'effusion,' and hurled my substantial young



person into his arms; he bore the charge with equanimity.

"Well, little lass!" said he, with his sorrowful smile, more sorrowful than any tears, "have you seen a great many fine people, and got a fine new lover, and are you very sorry to come back to the dull old house and the dull old man?"

"Of course I am," said I, with a fresh series of ursine hugs; "I should not have come back at all if it had not been that I knew the Cochin cock was to be killed to-morrow, and I thought I must come back and bid him good-bye, poor dear fowl, before he died. Come, dad," I continued, coaxingly, thrusting my arm through his in its threadbare gray coat-sleeve, and dragging him to the door, "let us come and see the pigs and the chickens, and I'll tell you all about it."

So we went, my daddy and I — went, and found the doomed chanticleer scratching and scraping peaceably on the dunghill, advertising the treasures he found there, now and again, to his harem, by one lordly cluck. The pigs and we exchanged civilities, and then I began, and narrated all things in order to my parent; how we had gone a pic-nic-ing, and how I had been upset out of a dogcart, and how I had fainted, and how funny it felt, and how disagreeable it was spending all the night in that little pot-house, reading the "Great Tribulation," and "waiting for the waggon" (my father looked unaccountably grave, I thought, at this stage of my narrative); what a lot there was for dinner every day; what smart gowns old Lady Lancaster had on, with many more interesting particulars concerning the Wentworth *ménage*; nor had I the modesty to hide or in any way qualify the fact that Sir Hugh, the middle-



aged, the desirable, the much-hunted, was the captive of my bow and spear. Then breath failed me, and I stopped, and threw damaged rice among the chickens.

"So you're going to be a great lady, are you, Miss Nelly?" said my father, playfully. "You won't speak to your poor old father, I suppose, when you are Lady Lancaster!"

That little bit of news had cheered him wonderfully; he looked less old, less bowed, all of a sudden, somehow. I leaned my elbows on the pigsty wall, reflectively.

"But, dad," objected I, "I've only said that Sir Hugh liked me; I have not said I liked him; that is a very different pair of shoes!"

My father did not heed my interruption.

"Lancasters and Lestranges!" said he to himself, as if the union of the two names was pleasant to him; "more like the old times! more like the good old times!"

A cold chill crept over me, as I thought of the baggage-waggon, and the barrack-room, and twopence a year.

"You seem very anxious to get rid of me, dad," said I, picking bits of lichen from between the slatey gray stones. "Why do you want me to marry Sir Hugh?"

"My poor little lass," said my father very pitifully, "because I'm wearing my life out, thinking every day, and all day long, what is to become of you when I'm dead and gone — gone to be with the little mother, Nell; I pray God," he said, very reverently, taking off his hat; "and also," he added, a minute afterwards, straightening himself, and looking every inch the proud



old gentleman he was, "because I believe that to see you raised to your right level again, and doing something towards bringing the old family back into its right position in the county, would add ten years to my life; upon my soul, I think it would!"

I could not dash his hopes — could not tell him that I was engaged to a man money-less, position-less, expectation-less; perhaps I ought to have done so, but I could not find it in my heart. So we turned homewards, I a saddened woman, sore perplexed. The chickens still scratched and pecked happily on the dunghill; the pigs grunted in the ineffable content of warmth and repletion; but to me the sunlight had gone out of grass and trees and shining pebbles.

## CHAPTER XXV.

AM I wrong in thinking that memory is the cruellest gift ever vouchsafed to man? Perhaps I am wrong to say any gift can be cruel, seeing who it is gives all the gifts, both the sweet and the bitter ones. But I cannot help thinking so. How happy we might be, any of us, in our very lowest, forlornest state, if we had no recollection of ever having held a higher, joyfuller one! If we had no remembrance of the treasures of love and youth and friendship we once owned, how happy we might make ourselves in the dearth or total absence of those good things! We might bask and roll — oh so lightheartedly! — in the young spring sun, and sniff at the pretty spring flowers, and drink in the lark's long rhapsody, if the brightness and the sweetness and the melody were not all dashed by the me-



mory of how much grandlier the sun shone, how much fragranter the primroses smelt, how much sweetlier the birds sang long ago, when we had some one to feel and smell and listen with us. For my part, if any fairy were to offer me the choice of a gift, as she did to the hero of the sausage tale, I would not hesitate one minute — I would beg her to give me a great full brimming cup of the wine of forgetfulness, and *how* greedily I would drink it up! Maundering again! How prosy I am getting! I am afraid I am painting the little cabinet pictures of my life too minutely, too elaborately; like a Dutch painter, I am reproducing the cabbages and onions, the pots and pans of every-day life, *exactly*, and without elevating them.

If I could, I would fain make a brilliant, dashing *Turneresque* sketch; great breadths of colour, infinite nobility and harmony, in few strokes; but that is above me; if I were to attempt it, I should make but a patchy, blotchy daub. No; I must put in numberless fine lines, carefulest shading and copying, before I can produce anything like Nature; not very like even then.

Here is another Dutch picture. Dolly's bedroom; a little sanctuary of innocence and purity and maidenly bread-and-butter thoughts, you would say, were you privileged to enter and survey it; a small white bed, spotless enough to shelter the slumber of St. Agnes, with dimity curtains, field flowers in white vases, good little devout prints on the walls; Timothy and Samuel, and the eternal three choristers; Ary Schefferian photographs, and illuminated texts. Texts do impress one so much more, — don't they? — when they are picked out in blue and yellow, and are playing hide-and-seek



amid numberless twirls and scrolls and flourishes? Dolly is sitting at the dressing-table brushing her hair, which, black as night, thick as a mermaid's, waveless, rippleless, lies heavy on her shoulders.

I am sitting on the open window-sill, and my small pale face looks out from amongst a bush of curly warm tinted fuzz. We are enjoying a little sisterly chat at our *coucher*; it is about a week after our return home.

"I wish," says Dolly, brushing away with vigour, "that people would sometimes manage to get the right end of a story."

"How do you mean?" I ask, a little absently.

"Oh, nothing particular," she answers lightly, "only Mrs. Smith has been giving me rather a garbled version of yours and Hugh's adventure, which she says is all over the country."

I frown. "What do I care?"

"Of course not," says my sister, smoothly combing out her long dusk locks, "only I don't think it is very pleasant to think of all the grooms in the neighbourhood making merry over Sir Hugh's huggings and kissings, and weepings over you, that time you were insensible; are you sure you were quite insensible, dear?"

I toss my ruddy mane in a fury.

"If I wasn't, may I be insensible for ever with a vengeance."

Dolly lays down her implements, and smiles good-humouredly.

"Poor little wooden-headed Damon!" she says, "you'll have to marry him after all, Nell, to stop people's mouths, and prevent their spreading all manner of naughty tales about you and him; what fun!"



"Have to marry a man because I happened to be pitched out of a dog-cart with him?" I say, with a snort, and a withering laugh. "Ha! ha!"

"No, dear," replies my elder, gravely twisting up her great black hair coils, with warm dimpled hands; "not because you were upset out of a dog-cart with him — people *will* forget that — but because you spent twenty-four hours alone in a little road-side public-house with him, and because everybody knows it, and will not forget it."

A moth floats in from the cool night, and frizzles himself to death in the candle. I feel quite glad. I am in the sort of humour when one is pleased at anything bad happening to anything. Dolly, good Dolly, drew her Bible to her, and looked out the evening lessons.

"By-the-by," said she, after a pause, "have not you heard from Major M'Gregor yet?"

"No, not yet," I have to own, rather reluctantly.

"Rather odd, isn't it?" asks Dolly, carelessly.

"Not the least odd," I say sharply: but all the same, I do think, and for every hour of the last four days have been thinking that it is odd, dreadfully odd; "of course he would be busy when first he got back to his regiment; of course he'd have a thousand things to do."

"Well, my dear, if you're pleased, I'm sure I am."

Dolly read her chapters piously all through, the dark long fringes shade the eyes that travel so devoutly along the sacred lines; how peaceful and holy the fair clear peach face looks. Why upon earth don't I go to bed, instead of sitting swinging my small



slipperd feet, ill-temperedly, to and fro? How still the great night outside is; the owls are snoring a little in the high elm tops, but that is all. Dolly's Bible clasps close with a little click.

"How very ill papa's getting to look," she says, looking up serene after her devotions, with a face

"Bright as for sins forgiven" —

"so much worse than before we went to Wentworth, even. Poor old gentleman! it makes me quite low to look at him."

I bounce off the window sill, and walk hurriedly up and down, my long blue dressing-gown floating behind me like a toga.

"Did you say that only to frighten me, or because you really think it?" I ask agitatedly.

"Because I really think it of course," replies she, gently; "is my sole *métier* in life to lacerate your feelings?"

"Seriously ill, do you mean, Dolly?" I ask very falteringly.

Dolly rises and stands by the window; how like a tall garden lily she looks, in her long soft white draperies!

"So ill," she says, emphatically, "that unless some one leaves him a legacy, or some piece of good luck happens to him, he'll be a dead man this time next year; those bills, and his anxiety as to what is to become of us — of *you*, I mean — after his death, are knocking a great many nails into his coffin."

Life without the old man! That was the very first time that that awful, awful thought presented itself to my mind.



"Dolly," said I, with tremulous eagerness, grasping her arm, "would it do him any good, do you think; would it comfort him at all, if I were to tell him about Dick?"

"Comfort him to know that you had found a man magnanimous enough, or selfish enough, to be willing to starve with you, and effectually prevent your doing anything towards raising the poor old family again, as it has been and is his dearest wish that it should be raised?" said my sister, with trenchant satire. "Yes, of course, it would comfort him immensely, no doubt. I know nothing more calculated to inspire consolation; good-night, Nell."

Dolly sinks on her knees, and prepares to engage in evening prayer, and I slink off to bed, and cry myself to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

I HAD gone to sleep weeping, as the night does; I awoke smiling as the morning. The troubles which had seemed so gigantic at 11 P.M. had contracted themselves to very moderate dimensions at 7 A.M. From mountains, they had become, not indeed quite mole-hills, but very gentle elevations. Dolly had a way of touching people on a weak part; of course it was to her interest to make me believe Dick unfaithful; and as to my father, why he *did* look rather ill and droopy of late. I had been thinking so myself, darling old thing! but then the hot weather never suited him; it always made him flag, as it did the flowers; when fresh winds came and cool cloudy skies, both he



and they would hold up their heads again, and brighten.

My code of morals, my system of rewards and punishments, was very simple, the story-book code; later on in life we find that the human race's kicks and halfpence are not administered in strict accordance with the rules of that code. The good boy gets cakes and ale; the naughty boy gets a whipping. There seemed to me an antecedent improbability in the idea of such an enormous grief being laid on the poor slight shoulders of a harmless girl, whose life, as far as overt acts of wickedness were concerned, was a sheet of white paper. It seemed like putting a camel's load on a fly's back. An enormous grief always does seem improbable when it is the first of its family. Its brothers and sisters excite less astonishment, though perhaps no less anguish.

"I saw two magpies yesterday." I say to myself, "that is a good omen; my letter will come to-day." I am standing before my looking-glass, sticking up my dead-leaf cables, with long hair pins. I don't look in the least the sort of woman that anything remarkable is likely to happen to; a fair, soft, foolish woman made to say loving inanities to a husband, to make socks for his children, and be utterly hum-drum and common-place and happy. The loud whir-ir-ring of the gong comes sounding upstairs, deadened by the thick oak doors; I run down in a hurry. My father is always up and out very early, long before any of us; while the house is yet in the housemaid's possession. He is out now, and I have to read prayers. I sit down with dignity in the old oak arm-chair, nearly black with age and varnish, and of the most uncom-



promising straightness of back — what strong spines our ancestors must have been blessed with, for apparently they never indulged in the luxury of leaning — open the ancient calf-backed Bible, in which twenty-one and nineteen years ago respectively, my father recorded the doubtful blessing of his daughters' births.

Opposite me, on a long bench, sit the servants, in clean caps and aprons, and behind them open windows, and the sun, and the green trees, and the June airs at play. It is a very long chapter; all about the Israelitish wars, how Joshua and his host took Ai and the king thereof, and the people thereof, and killed them all; and then went off to Libnah, and did the same there, and then on again ditto. *How* tired they must have got of cutting and hacking those poor Aborigines! About the middle of the bloody annals I look up, and take a glance off through the window over the servants' heads, and see the old postman with the swinging gait and the withered-apple cheeks, shambling down the drive. He is earlier than his wont. I lose my place and grope hopelessly for it with eyes and fingers, for about five minutes. Having found it, I set off at a hard gallop and race through Thursday morning, third week in Thornton's "Family Prayers," skipping the "Queen, the Clergy, and the Children of this family" altogether. I come to Amen, at last; and before the servants are off their knees, I am at the Hall door.

The old postman has gone again; he is half way up to the gate by now; he knows our manners and customs and has left the bag hanging on the bell. I tear it open; the Times and a Pamphlet; half-a-dozen



blue envelopes in the usual sprawly tradesmen's hands for Sir Adrian Lestrangle — poor darling Sir Adrian, I wish I might pitch them all at the back of the fire — a pink note, and two letters for Miss Lestrangle, and one letter for Miss Eleanor Lestrangle.

One letter, but alas! alas! not the right one! It is, as I find out later, when I have patience to read it, from a sister of my mother's, an excellent '*mère de famille*,' and its purport is chiefly to tell me that dear Cecilia has had the nettle-rash, and that dear Archie has passed for the Line, and has come out 41st, and, indeed, no wonder, considering the way in which he has been reading for the last three months. Now I throw it down and stamp upon it.

"What's the matter?" asks Dolly, coming tripping downstairs; and the young June morning is not fresher or fairer than she. Dolly does not often favour us with her company at our morning orisons.

"Everything's the matter," I say, exhaustively, picking up my aunt's effusion, and flinging it to the other end of the room.

"Not got your letter yet?"

"No."

"Dear me! how odd! are you sure it has not slipped inside that Magazine?"

"How *could* it?" I say gruffly.

"Perhaps you forgot to give him your direction?" (How likely!)

"No, I didn't."

"Perhaps you did not write it clear enough?"

"I wrote it as plain as a pikestaff!"

"Hm! perhaps he is ill?"

"Don't say that!" I cry eagerly, turning pale, "I'd



rather he'd have forgotten me than that; no, I don't think that I would either; oh Dolly, Dolly, what can be the matter?" I sink down on the bench and cover my eyes with my hand.

"Perhaps it'll come to-morrow?" says Dolly; turning away, and in a kinder voice than usual.

"It'll never come!" I say tempestuously, flinging down my head on my arms, on the cold wooden table.

"Sh! Sh! don't make a scene! here's papa!" By a great effort I throw off my own trouble, for the time; defer it to a more convenient season; I can always do that for *him*, and then I go to the old man and put my arms about him, and thank him for the flowers he has brought me — he always brings me a little pretty bunch, summer and winter — and kiss the old pale weary face so lovingly. The dew and the moist night airs have lifted up the heads of the plants and shrubs that drooped so yesterday, but I misdoubt me this old scathed tree will never hold his head up again bravely, till the dear Lord transplants him to a kindlier, warmer clime.

"This is the day of the Coxes' croquet party, isn't it?" says Dolly, as we sat at breakfast, "his '*Fate Shompater*, as Mr. Coxe resolutely calls it; we need not go till about four I should think, need we?"

"I shall not go at all!" I say doggedly.

"Nonsense," says Dolly, severely, "you must go; you cannot treat people in that way, accepting their invitations, and then never going near them, it's *too* bearish!"

"I don't want to go!" I say, plaintively, turning towards my father, and stretching out my hand to stroke his.



"You want to stay with the old man, do you, Nell? So you shall! So you shall! there's plenty of people to go to the Coxes' fine party without you."

"Just as you please, of course," says Dolly, very coldly; "children of nature are not accountable beings, I suppose; poor Sir Hugh! I'd sooner meet a bear robbed of her whelps, than him in the state he'll be in to-day!"

I frown at her to stop, but the mischief is done.

"Is Sir Hugh Lancaster to be there?" asks my father, lifting up his head.

"Yes, to be sure he is, he is coming all the way down from town, on purpose to see — Amaryllis Coxe."

We all held our tongues for a minute.

"I think, Nell," says my father, rising slowly to leave the room; "I think perhaps, you had better go; they are civil people, and there's no use giving offence."

---

"I suppose," says Dolly, as we entered the Coxian Park gates that afternoon; "I suppose, we shall finish up with a dance, for I heard Coxe *père* telling Lady Capel that his daughters were 'so uncommonly fond of cutting capers, that if they could not have a 'op anywhere else, they got up a kick-up at home.'"

As we drive up to the door, I see a faint pitying smile flitting over the countenances of the butler and footmen as they glance at our equipage, but they are too well drilled not to stifle it instantly. Mrs. Coxe receives us in the white and gold drawing-room; the gorgeous glare of which makes one's eyes water this



bright day. Mr. Coxe tells us that "he is 'appy to see us in 'is 'ouse," and that "he believes his young ladies are out in the front, and would not we like to join them?" Ploughboys, parsons, doctors, and lawyers may have sons and daughters, but the

"Lord and Ladies and the Miss O'Gradys,"

alias, the Upper Ten Thousand, and the Coxes, have "young gentlemen and young ladies." In Mr. Coxe's vocabulary, a room is an apartment, a house is a mansion or a residence, and a wife is a lady or a partner. He does not mean to be pompous in the least; he can no more help talking Manchester than a dog can help barking. So we step out through the great plate-glass windows, which are thrown high up, out on a broad urned and statued terrace, and thence on to the croquet ground, which is mown as short as a convict's hair, and where we find Mr. Coxe's "young ladies and gentlemen," as well as many other people's disporting themselves.

It is hardly saying too much to put croquet as an invention on a level with gunpowder and printing; it certainly is more unmixedly beneficial to the human race than either of the others. Who can be sufficiently loud in praise of a common standing ground, where man and woman can meet without man being effeminate, or woman masculine. It requires a strong effort of memory to realize the barren time when women struggled through their long weary days, unassisted by those gracious twins, croquet and afternoon tea. At the Coxe's croquet party, I need hardly say that there were a great many more women than men. I never yet was at a croquet party where such was not



the case, for admirable pastime as it is, no man that is a man, and not a curate, will ever be induced to put his hand to a mallet, unless he has absolutely nothing else to do.

"There was Lady Grease Wrister,  
And Madam Van Twister,  
Her Ladyship's sister,  
Lord Cram and Lord Vultur,  
Sir Brandish O'Cultur  
With Marshal Carowzer,  
And old Lady Mowzer,  
And the great Hanoverian Baron Pansmouzer."

All the fashionable men are up in town, of course, so are Lord and Lady Capel; they have gone to the Palace Hotel for a month; a poor equivalent for the house in Park Lane, but better than nothing. So is Lady Lancaster; entertaining kindred frumps and fozzles in Eaton Square.

The Scots Greys are still to the fore, for "England expects every man to do his duty," and their duty is at present to guard the Cathedral Close and Minor Canons of Nantford from invasion. Little De Laney is here too, much to his own disgust. Instead of leaning his jolly little smooth face out of the modest bow-window of his corps' club, he is dancing attendance on a moribund uncle for whose gouty shoes he is lying in wait, the mercenary infant!

"Ammy! Ammy! Amaryllis, my dear!" cries Mrs. Coxe, as we appear on the scene — Amaryllis is mistress of the ceremonies, and is flitting about in an elaborate Parisian toilette, eminently suited for a Chiswick breakfast or a Horticultural Fête, and looks as she generally does, all nose and bust — "here are the



Miss Lestranges, my dear; I hope you can make up a set for them!"

Amaryllis looks doubtful; there are five or six sets in full force already, and how to provide the gentle stimulus of a man or two for each game, is the problem which has been making her curse the day on which she was born for the last half hour. What to do with our pauper population is a joke to it. All the parish priests, and all the red coats, with whatever carefullest economy expended, have been used up.

"There are Mortimer Spencer, and the two Miss Lestranges, and myself, that's four," she says, slowly; "but that would be so dull for them; there's Sir Hugh Lancaster and Mr. De Laney, but they won't play; my sisters asked them to join their game some time ago, but they would not; they said they did not know how."

"Perhaps," Dolly suggests, with a suave little smile, "perhaps if you ask them again, and make a great favour of it, they would not be so obdurate; people must not be allowed to be lazy on an occasion like this." Amaryllis shakes her head and goes reluctant; two minutes more, and she returns in triumph, leading the two culprits. Hugh, as I am well aware, would be most happy to play dolls, marbles, jack straws, anything, were I to be his assistant.

"Little birds that can sing and won't sing, must be made to sing," says my sister, playfully, putting out a ready sisterly hand to Hugh; "so your lordships have condescended to yield to our importunities; we were meditating going on our knees, if that were necessary."

"The little birds are quite game for singing till



they crack their little throats if anybody 'll show 'em how," says De Laney, putting in his little oar. Hugh is never strong at badinage, he has as heavy a hand at it, as a bad cook has with onions. On the present occasion, I appear to have taken away his elderly breath, for he is staring at me as a school-boy at a mince-pie, as a pig at acorns. Really it is too bad of him, when he has been having the handsomest women in England, in the becomingest dresses passing in review before him every day for the last week, that he should be gaping like a bird in the pip at a simple country girl in a little straw-hat.

"What sides? what sides?" asks Amaryllis, "Morty, dear, put that hoop straight."

I go up to Mr. De Laney, who is arranging a little delicate bouquet of heliotrope and geranium in his button-hole. "Will you be sure and play with me?" I say, eagerly.

The young fellow looks slightly surprised.

"I, of course I will; proudest moment of my existence; only I think it fair to warn you that I never got through a hoop in my life."

"Miss Coxe," I say, lifting up a trembling voice and blushing, "Shall you and I and Mr. De Laney play the other three?"

"That would not be fair," puts in Dolly, with slight asperity in her tone; "you are such a good player; you have given us much the weakest side; you had better let me take your place, that would make it nearly equal!"

"I think," says Amaryllis, coming to my rescue, "that Miss Eleanor Lestranger's arrangement is the best on the whole; Mortimer is much better than I am,



and I suppose that Sir Hugh and Mr. De Laney are about equal."

Dolly is too well mannered to oppose the fiat of the mistress of the ground, and she bites her lip, and says, smiling, "Well, 'never say die' must be our motto, and Mr. Coxe won't scold us *very* much if we do get him into disgrace, will he?"

Mr. Coxe junior wears barnacles, and his complexion is spotted as the pard's; but his heart is tender. Dolly never puts all her money on one horse; she has many irons in the fire, and Mortimer Spencer De Lacy is her last and smallest one.

"Blue begins; Morty, give Miss Lestrangle the blue."

I make an inward resolution that where my boy goeth, I will go; that the hoop or the tunnel, or the bell that bids defiance to his inexperienced chocolate ball shall do the same to my practised green; so that I may have an excuse for sticking close into his pocket; it is the first time that the dear little fellow has ever been used as a chaperon, I fancy.

"I did not think I should see you again," I say, in a very friendly manner, anxious to engage in conversation, and edging up to where he stands, dishonestly trying to kick his ball into position without being detected. "I thought you were going back to Windsor."

"So did I, but *l'homme* proposes, and *l'homme's* great uncle by marriage disposes."

"How tiresome for you; have you got to stay long?"

"Oh, I suppose till the old party up there," jerking his head in the direction of his uncle's place, "takes



himself off to Abraham's bosom, which he does not seem in any hurry to do at present."

"You don't seem very sorry for the poor old gentleman," I say, laughing rather nervously and squinting out of the corner of my left eye, to discover the whereabouts of my Sir John Suckling.

"How can he expect one to be sorry for him, when he takes to dying at such an ungodly time? if he had put it off a month now, it would have suited me down to the ground; there's never much doing in July."

"That's the way somebody will be talking of you by-and-by," I say, with a smile.

"Not a doubt of it, unless I give them the slip by being cut off in my youth and beauty beforehand," he says, with a grin at the thought of his own demise.

The Coxian croquet ground is to other croquet grounds what the garden of Eden is to other gardens; it is the realization of a croquet player's dream. Flat as a billiard-table, big as a race-course, with a fountain plashing coolly into a stone basin in the middle, and with lime trees round it. They are all in flower now, and their yellowish, greenish, whitish blossoms make the air almost too heavy. The women in their blue and green and white dresses look like big pretty flowers starring the sunny grass.

Further off, a very smart marquee spreads its flag to the wind — of which, by-the-by, there is uncommonly little — there, later on, we are to flourish the festive heels. Mr. Coxe comes strutting out presently with his little fat hands in his breeches pockets, and that face which would be of such eminent service to him in a *Jacquerie*, or French Revolution, stamping him so unmistakably as of the people.



"Well, Miss Lestrangle, and how are we getting on? progressing, eh? ha! ha! progressing?"

"Not progressing at all, I'm afraid, Mr. Coxe!" says Dolly, smiling; "on the contrary, retrograding, I think!"

"I'm afraid you don't find my son a very efficient coadjutor," continues Mr. Coxe, pompously, putting his hands under his coat tails, and standing with his legs rather wide apart. Mr. Coxe will probably be among Lord ——'s next batch of lords.

"*Quite* wrong!" says Dolly, glancing up under her little wild rose-wreathed shepherdess hat at the blushing Mortimer. Bagging Mortimer, is like rook shooting, Dolly thinks; the poorest of all sport, but still it is sport. Then half-a-dozen extrasized footmen come stalking along, bringing ices and Badminton on superb trays, and we stop pounding one another for a few minutes, and by the aid of these refreshments endeavour to bring ourselves down from boiling point. I see Sir Hugh pouring out a tumbler of Badminton for himself; a nice cooling drink; I hope he'll take a great deal of it. Soon we return to our game with renewed vigour.

"Send her away over there! tight croquet; *I* should; she plays next." This is a most unnecessary piece of brutality, for I, with my Grenadier, am struggling for the second hoop, far in the background, as I resolved at the outset I would be.

"We stick together like leeches!" the boy said to me, just now, very innocently; "Damon, and what was the other f'la's name — something beginning with a P., you know." My poor green goes spinning off under



the limes, disturbing the bees, and I, of course, have to go after it.

"My mother sent her love to you," says a too, too well-known voice at my elbow. Hugh is not like himself to-day, somehow; he has not made a single joke, and he looks sheepish, and tail-between-the-legs-ish. Being in love is sadly unbecoming to a man; particularly to one who is not in the bloom of youth. Little Dresden shepherds in pink coats and blue breeches look pretty when they are casting sheep's eyes at little fat shepherdesses in powder, and red cheeks; but a real live man, sunburnt, hirsute, broadclothed, looks ridiculous. Flight, without the most flagrant incivility, is out of the question.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to her."

"I only came down from town, last night."

"Oh!"

"I came down on purpose for this — what d'ye call it — this croquet thing."

"Oh!"

"Do you suppose I came down to see the Coxes?" Hugh never pays much attention to the requirements of Mrs. Grundy; he is talking now with much more earnestness than the subjects that generally come up at a croquet party are calculated to engender.

I look down very demurely, and make a little excavation in the smooth turf with my mallet. "I don't know, I'm sure."

"Cannot you guess who I came to see? you are sharp enough, generally." (He *must* be in love to call me sharp; he might as well compliment Dolly on her piety.)

"I don't know, I'm sure!" I say very pettishly;



for I perceive that we are the objects of a good deal of amused notice, and I even detect my little naughty soldier chuckling all to himself behind his pocket-handkerchief.

"I cannot bear being asked questions; will you move, please?"

I give my ball a great vicious hit, which sends it flying back to the haunts of men; and I fly after it, at the top of my speed. Hugh follows me, more surprised than sorrowful; he *cannot*, and *will* not, understand. His notions of courtship are like Samson's, who went down to Timnath, and saw a woman that pleased him, and told his parents so, and after that it was all plain sailing. Our game comes to an end at last. Despite heroic efforts on the part of Amaryllis, our side is beaten. It would have been very odd if it had not been; seeing that I had been riding a donkey race, holding in my own jackass, and goading on my adversary's.

"Now for the muffin worry," says De Laney, as we stroll towards the house, having thrown down our implements of warfare.

"Yes," I say, laughing; "we are all being walked off to have clean bibs and tuckers on!"

The Muffin Worry is an Aldermanic feast; a dinner in all but the name. Everything that a hundred-guinea cook, silver epergnes, gold plate, hot-house flowers, grapes as big as plums, and pines as big as pumpkins could do, was done, and yet it all seemed to fall rather flat and dead somehow. Perhaps this was owing to the large preponderance of the fair sex; half a score of women being obliged to come huddling in together. I am led into the room, where first Dick looked away



my foolish heart, by Major Somebody — I did not catch the name — he wears golosches, and his brother officers always talk of him as “she.” On my other side is Violet Coxe. Ill-natured *he* friends have christened the three Miss Coxes “Free and Easy,” “Freer and Easier,” “Freest and Easiest;” Violet is “Freest and Easiest.” Violet smokes Regalias, and calls men by their surnames to their faces. Lily smokes cigarettes, and Amaryllis does not smoke at all, because it makes her sick. Image to yourself the *ne-plus-ultra* of vulgarity, fastness, and good nature, and you have the gentle Violet.

“I never asked you about your spill the other night,” says she, in her loud voice; “I had other fish to fry; ha! ha! you pitched on your head, didn’t you, and kept flourishing your legs in the air, till Hugh Lancaster came and turned you right way up again.”

“Oh, hush! hush!” I say, in an agony of fear lest she should be overheard.

“Why, it was not your fault, though I did hear some cock-and-bull story the other day about the horses not having run away at all, and it’s being all my grandmother!”

I flush crimson, and my eyes fill with tears.

“How cruel people are!” I say; “what a dreadful world it is!”

“Lor’, my dear! he didn’t mean to be cruel; he only thought you did it for a lark; *I’d* have done it as soon as look.”

“Who was it said so?” I asked, indignantly.

“’Pon my honour I forget — oh, yes, to be sure, it was that old rip, Leroy — I remember now, because



M'Gregor pitched into him so, when he said it — gave it him right and left."

My heart begins to beat wildly; I see the muslin of my dress agitated by its quick, hard pulsations; here is an opportunity for getting some news of him.

"Mr. M'Gregor has gone to Ireland, I believe," I say faintly.

"Yes, poor old boy! he was as sick as a cat, I dare say, crossing; he's an awful bad sailor; we all cried when he went, and Ammy took to her bed, goodness knows why, for he never looked the same side of the room where she was; good-looking fellow, isn't he? I always say that those destroying angels ought not to be let walk about loose, without tickets on their backs marked 'Dangerous.'"

"He *is* handsome!" I say, turning away my head.

"Morty heard from him this morning; I saw his handwriting; and what did I do but open the letter and read every blessed word in it — wasn't Morty in a stew? oh no! not at all — and he sent his love to us all; wasn't it nice of him?" (He is not ill then; he can write to other people).

The room swims round me for a minute, then I seize a glass of water, and drink it.

"Was he — was he — pretty well?" I gasp.

"Oh, yes; he seemed very bobbish! he said Cork was very jolly quarters, and there were heaps of pretty girls — goodness me what's the matter with you? why you are as white as the table-cloth — are you going to *die*?"

I do not die, though I almost wish myself dead. Oh cruel, beautiful King Olaf! are you tired of me



already? I knew that a poor stupid ignorant girl like me, was not a fit mate for you!

The long dull feast comes to an end, and the dancing begins in the marquee. There is the same band they had at Wentworth; clack clack go the bones, and the fiddles squeak, and the everlasting weary tum te tum, tum te tum goes on again.

God knows I had not much inclination for dancing; but even tearing round and round, with dragging feet, and a heart as heavy as lead, is better than the inevitable alternative sitting out with Hugh. I have to dance with him of course.

"Come and take a turn outside," he says, drawing me towards the scene of our late contest, where the limes' long shadows have thrown themselves all along upon the dewy grass, like black-stoled nuns in prayer; and where the fountain is splashing and falling drip, drip, in silver showers in the moonlight.

"No, no!" I say hastily, drawing back, "I'd rather not; the grass is wet."

"You did not seem to find it so just now, when you were sitting on those stone steps with De Laney ever so long," he says, rather affronted.

"Please don't tease!" I say with irritation.

"But there's something I want to say to you," he urges pertinaciously, catching my hand.

"For goodness sake, don't!" I say rudely; "I'm sure I should not like to hear it."

As we drove home that night Dolly said,

"Did Sir Hugh propose to you to-day, Nell?"

"No," said I, shortly; "and if he has a grain of sense, he never will."

---



## CHAPTER XXVII.

I KEPT a journal in those days; if I wished I could tell you, oh my friends, all I did, and a little of what I thought every day for the next six months. But I think even the patientest among you would go to sleep, or at least would yawn very widely, were I to test your powers of endurance with such an infliction. On the contrary, oh kind unknowns! I will take a great leap in my narration, a leap as big as Pedro Alvarado's; a leap from June to December; the next picture in my little homely Hollandish series is a winter one.

Oh, cruel six months! They have stolen so much from me, and they have given me nothing in return. They found me very rich in hope and love and pleasant thoughts; they left me nearly bankrupt in them all.

I am standing by my bedroom window, looking out listlessly. The white dimity curtains look chilly and cheerless, and there comes in a draught that would turn a mill under the ill-fitting door; the mignonette in the green box is dead, and the birds are silent. Outside also it looks very dreary. Winter has not come in prettily this year, with his ermine cloak and his ice-diamonds. He is an ugly fellow enough; he has come in meekly, wetly, muggily; the meadows are all sponge, and the roads all pomatum. A green Christmas, they say, makes a fat churchyard, and this Christmas is very green.

Now and again, great strong west winds sweep and riot over the land, not cold, but noisy, blowy, blustery, crashing down great tree-limbs, and making chimney-pots and tiles clatter down from house tops and church



roofs. I turn away disconsolately from the spectacle of nature's life in death, and look vacantly in the glass.

Can that be the same round, dimpled, laughing face that met me in that same mirror six short months ago? the curse of the daughters of Zion seems to have fallen upon me; "burning instead of beauty." Hollow cheeks; the corners of the mouth drawn down, and the lines about it puckered up, as if with continual weeping; dark deep shadows under the eyes, the great wistful blue eyes that seem to see everything now mistily, dimly through unshed tears; the hair twisted up with such negligent untidiness, as if nobody cared or thought about it any longer; and the figure, the pretty, tall figure, drooping and nerveless.

What is it has dimmed and marred my fair looks so? What evil thing have the rolling hours brought me? What is the cause — what are the causes of the breaking heart that looks out so wanly from that small young face? Shall I tell you? First, then, and oh, far, far foremost, my father is very ill — dying. God is going to take away my dear old dad from me; the old man with whom I walked long ago in the pleasant fields gathering buttercups, in a white frock and a blue sash — the old man with whom I have had so many little jokes, and such loving little tiffs, he who seems to be woven into the fabric of my very life. Warp and woof must be parted now; the threads of his life be dissevered from mine, for He who made has uttered His fiat of recall; He who gave is about to take away.

When first this terrible thought came home icily to my heart (it was one night, weeks ago, as I knelt at



my evening prayers — those prayers out of which one name must so soon drop) I rebelled fiercely against it, pushed it violently from me, it could not, would not be — it was too bad to happen — and my soul went up agonizedly to the great God above me, in intercession for that dear old life, as so many souls have gone up before me, but that prayer found no acceptance.

In nightly vigils on my dark bed, I wrestled and strove with that grisly phantom; I would stand in the breach between him and my old man; he should not come at him, should not smite him with that mighty blade that lays the generations low; but to what purpose? He has put me aside, he is drawing ever nigher, not stealthily, insidiously, but openly in the eye of day, so that all may count his strides, and mark his coming.

So my dear old father is going away from me on a long, long journey, and I don't rightly know what I am to do without him. Is not this enough to make me sad? But besides this greatest cause for woe, I have yet another sore grief, which, but for the advent of the yet more unbearable one, would have seemed to me unendurable; my lover has forsaken me. He on whose love I should have rested, he on whose strong young heart I should have leaned in this bitter hour, has forgotten me; not once in all these weary months has he written to me.

How many days there are in six months, how many post times! Just so many times have I had to undergo the pangs of a most grievous disappointment, a sharp smart stab at first, then a long, dull, weary ache. And I had written to him, oh, so often! very joyfully and very lovingly first; very anxiously and very lovingly next; then grievedly, bitterly, but lovingly, always;



and at last I had ceased writing, and had sunk into the dumbness of despair.

Dolly did not exult over me much; she reminded me, indeed, that she had warned me against him, and opined that, perhaps next time, I should be more inclined to take her advice; but, on the whole, she was good-natured, and tried to comfort me on the same grounds as would have afforded herself consolation in a like case, viz., his poverty and consequent undesirability; the vanity and nothingness of the passion of love, and lastly, her invariable *corps de reserve* — Sir Hugh.

And now, oh my friends, do not be very hard upon me; do not call me ugly names, as fickle and heartless; do not sit in judgment upon me when I tell you that I myself have of late been thinking much of this same Sir Hugh; not with more love or less loathing than of yore, but as my possible, probable fate. I wanted to do right, God knows! I thought it must be right to do this, because it was so hard, so difficult, so revolting. I see *now* that I was wrong, but *then* my head was full of Iphigenia and Jephtha's daughter-like ideas.

The doctor said that perfect exemption from all care and anxiety *might*, probably would, prolong my father's life for weeks, nay months; and to win so dear, so inestimably precious a boon as his presence among us, for even a few days longer than I otherwise should have it, I was willing to sacrifice all my future years, willing to give my shrinking body to Sir Hugh's arms, and my abhorring soul into his custody, though both body and soul clave still with desperate, ineradicable passion to that other.



Since I drew my last life-picture our affairs had become quite desperate; the children of Israel had come down upon us like locusts; a dreadful man with a hook nose, thick lips, and a greasy Hebrew face had come to take an inventory of the furniture and movables. To spare our feelings and obviate the unpleasant necessity of having a strange man quartered upon us, our old man-servant had been turned into a bailiff for the nonce.

My father could not move outside his own pleasure-grounds. "I suppose they will let him pass by to his grave," I thought, bitterly. Bills and duns showered like hail about our ears, and there we stood, helpless, defenceless, without hope or refuge. An old dying man, and two poor young daughters in such a case. What could be more pitiful? Mrs. Smith has just been telling me that "she's mor'lly certain there'll be a hexecootion in the 'ouse afore the week's hout; that there will, drabbit 'em all!"

An execution! Won't that put the finishing stroke to the work of decay and sickness? Will that enfeebled frame ever be able to bear the rough world's jeers at the yawning rifts and rents in the poor old family's sides; those rifts that through so many tired years he has been painfully trying to draw a tattered covering over. Will not the poor gray head be driven to take refuge before its time in the restful grave? I clench my hands. I *must* do it; I must. My face looks back, hard and rigid, from the glass at me; "I must, I must;" it seems to say too. As I stand thus in an attitude worthy of Lady Macbeth, the door opens, and Dolly enters hurriedly, without knocking.

"Sir Hugh's here," she says, rather hesitatingly;



she does not quite know how I shall take her bit of news; once or twice, lately, I have turned savage under her exhortations and entreaties. I do not turn savage now; I say nothing, only the rigid face in the glass grows more rigid. My resolution is to be put to the test soon indeed!

Dolly's beauty is nowise dimmed by grief; sorrow has dug no ugly hollows in her cheeks, nor dulled the sleepy splendour of her eyes. She looks a little pale and anxious, but she manages somehow to do even that becomingly. Nor is her appearance less *soignée* than it was; her dress is simpler indeed than it used to be; as simple as it can be; but that only serves to make her look younger, more innocently girlish. She wore now a thick black serge gown almost as plain as a riding-habit.

"It will do so nicely for mourning with a little crape on it," had been the thought in Dolly's mind when she bought that dress — the unexpressed thought, but by some instinct I had divined that she had so thought, and I hated her for it.

"For God's sake, be civil to him!" she says now, coming up and laying an eager hand on my shoulder, "he is our only hope!"

"I know it," I say, coldly.

"For pity's sake don't snub him: be good to him! do think of somebody beside yourself for once." (Dolly, of all people, to give that advice!)

"I don't mean to snub him; I mean to be civil to him; I have made up my mind," I say resolutely, with that dull pain tightening round my heart.

"Made up your mind to *marry* him! You don't mean it?" cries my sister joyfully, while the prettiest



carmine wave ripples into her soft cheeks. "*Bon Dieu!* how thankful I am!"

"Don't!" I say harshly, pushing her away; her mirth grated horribly somehow on my tense nerves.

"Do make yourself a little bit tidy before you go to him," she says, untying the blue ribbon that binds her own inky hair waves, and preparing to insinuate it among my curly wig. But I resist.

"No," I say doggedly, "leave me alone; I won't be made up for sale: if he chooses to bid for this piece of goods, he shall see all the flaws in it. I don't want to cheat him in his bargain." So I went, limp and crumpled to meet my fate. Before I had given my resolution time to cool, I found myself in the library facing my *futur*.

He was standing with his back to the fire, whistling softly to himself. Evidently he had called in on his way back from hunting; he had on a very shabby stained old red coat, and very splashed spattered breeches and tops, but somehow he did not look at all a bad fellow, nor an ill-looking one either. When he saw me, he stopped whistling, and dropped his coat tails.

"Well, how is he to-day? not worse, I hope?" he says it very heartily; there is a true ring in his deep voice, as if he really meant it.

"No, not worse. I think much the same, thanks!"

I sit down in my limpness on the sofa, and feel as if I were going to have a leg or an arm cut off, and as if Hugh was the operator, and I wish he would make haste and begin. Oh, if I could but take a whiff of chloroform, and awake to find the limb amputated, the process over, the wooing accomplished.



The fire glows ruddy in the wide old chimney; the flames go curling, spiring, quivering upwards. I gaze at the steel dogs in the hearth, and await the operation.

"You've grown very thin since last I was here." That is how it begins. The surgeon is taking off his coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeves.

"Very likely," I say, bitterly. "Lying awake at night, and having worries, and being miserable, does not conduce to putting flesh on one's bones!"

"I wish to Heaven I could take half your worries for you; God knows I would if I could; will you let me try?" The kind honest tones, and the kind simple words upset me quite; I am easily upset now-a-days. I pull out my pocket-handkerchief; my face undergoes the odd, droll ugly contortions and workings of a person about to cry, and I burst into bitter tears. My nose reddens, and my eyelids get pink, and I sit rocking to and fro, and feeling a very desolate little girl indeed.

"Won't you let me go halves in all your troubles, dear?" he asks, very gently.

He has come and stood close before me in his eagerness, and intercepts my view of the steel dogs. I look up through my tears straight at him. I am relieved that we are getting to business so soon.

"Do you mean that you want me to marry you?" I ask, bluntly.

"Yes, I do," he says, simply; "you know I do; you know how long I have been wishing and longing for it."

There is a little pause — a little minute, when my thoughts go back miserably to that curled Greek head,



to those dark, passionate, gray eyes, that looked so true and were so false; then I say, very slowly and with infinite difficulty —

“I will — do as you wish, if — if — you will — lend me — give me — some money — *a great deal*; oh dear — oh dear!”

My sobs burst out fresh, I feel so degraded in my own eyes. He did not ask me what I wanted money for — no doubt he divined; only the jollity died out of his honest face, and a pained look took its place.

“Of course you know,” he said, very heartily; “I hope I need not tell you that — that you are welcome, most welcome, to every farthing I possess, to make ducks and drakes of, if you like; but — but I don’t want you to marry me for that.”

“If I take money from you I must marry you,” I said, calmly. “I could not do it else.”

It seemed to me the most matter-of-fact piece of barter in the world; so much young flesh and blood for so much current coin of the realm.

“Why, won’t you try and like me?” he says, passionately.

It seems hard to him that his house, and his lands, and his dirty money should count for more with me than his loving heart, and his tender, faithful eyes; and as he speaks he throws himself on the sofa beside me.

“I *will* try and like you,” I say, conquering myself, setting my teeth, and vanquishing my intense desire to say something very rude, and rush away from him; but even as I speak I shudder at his proximity.

“We might be so happy,” he says, rather plaintively. “I am not a very hard fellow to live with, I



don't think; I've never had a word with mother all these twenty years, and you'd be easier to get on with, I fancy, than she is, poor old lady!"

"We *will* try and be happy," I say, firmly, and I give him my hand.

The operation is nearly over now, and I am alive after it. Then I am gathered to the middle-aged heart, to the stained red coat, and the gray knitted waistcoat, and kissed, and thanked, and blessed, and adjectived. I tear myself away at last, and escape to my room, where I fling myself on my bed, and scrub my desecrated countenance, and wail, "Oh, Dick, Dick—oh, my love, my love!" to the unresponsive pillow.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIR HUGH must have abandoned the pursuit of the wily fox at an early hour on that memorable afternoon, seeing that it was but half-past two, when, the deed being done, he rode off on his long raking bay mare—rode off to go and tell his mamma of his prowess, and of what a lovely, willing bride he had achieved. Only half-past two; there was therefore ample time for my father and me to take our daily stroll; that stroll which we still took, though it had become such a woeful pitious shadow of what it used to be. No earthly persuasion could induce my father to give in to being an invalid, to stay in bed, and have a doctor. Every day he *would* get up and dress; *would* come down-stairs, and sit in the library; *would* sit in his usual chair, and read his usual books; but every day the dressing and the coming down-stairs took longer; every day the wheels



of the chariot drove more heavily; every day the silver cord loosened — loosened; every day the frail vessel of that dear life drifted ever faster — faster out into the great desolate homeless sea of Death. As well as any one could tell him, he knew that he was dying — knew that the few last sands of his hour-glass were dribbling slowly out; no need to break the news to him. To “break” implies that the news is bad; but to him this was not ill news; to him it seemed an evangel — “good tidings of great joy.” But though he so well knew that solemnest fact — perhaps the more so because he did so know it — he seemed now to taste a deeper, tenderer joy than ever, even of yore, in Nature’s sweet presence; even in her leafless trees, her riotous western breezes, and her chill December suns.

And thus it came to pass that we two, who were so close to each other now; we, who, a month hence, should be severed far as time is parted from eternity, walked out together every day, gravely and lovingly.

At first, our walk comprised pleasure-ground, farm-yard, and home wood; but then, after a little, we had to drop the wood, had to say a long good-by to it — to the pleasant wood with its oaks, and its tangled briars, and its crimson dogwood — for it lay on a rising ground, and taxed too hardly the poor struggling, difficult breath.

A week more, and the farm-yard is abandoned for a like cause. Every day the walk grows shorter, the steps slower, the end nearer! God! What torture can be comparable to that of standing, with one dearer to us than life, on the edge of that awfulest, blackest gulf, seeing him slipping, slipping down into it, unable to



stretch out a finger to prevent him; to help him back again up the kindly hither bank.

On the afternoon of my betrothal, we were, as usual, creeping with tedious lagging steps along the gravel walk, round the flowerless flower-beds, stopping every ten paces to take breath. My father was wrapped up in his old greatcoat, (ah me, how he used to eschew great coats in bygone days!) and I, with my arm passed through his, am trying to help on his tottering steps, without his finding out that he is so helped.

"I think you seem to be walking a little better to-day, dearest old man!" I say.

"Am I, Nell? I'm not a very grand traveller, I don't think."

We stop, and look over the wire fence at the drenched-looking grass, at the rich, wet, loamy earth.

"If this mild weather lasts, we shall be seeing the crocuses out in flower here, in another month," I say.

"I shall never see the crocuses again!" says my father, simply.

A rush of tears blinds me, and through them I look up at the yellowing sunken face — the face that is so immeasurably more to me than all the world besides, — more, ten thousand times, than even my beautiful false lover — and I *know* that he speaks truth; that I shall be looking at the crocuses' golden blaze *alone*. In a few minutes I swallow back my tears; I have all the rest of my life-time to weep in, but they must not come now! not now; not now! I say, gently pressing the dear arm that leans so feebly on mine.

"You must not say melancholy things to-day, dar-



ling old daddy, for I have got such a nice piece of news for you!"

"News! have you, Nell?" says he cheerfully. "Why, little lass, you're getting like the Athenians, that spent their time in nothing else but either to hear or to tell some new thing."

Some spirits can jest and joke even on the verge of that gulf that swallows time and space, nor with any irreverence towards the Great Presence, in whose ante-chamber they stand waiting

"Like infants, sporting by the roar  
Of the Everlasting Deep."

Such was my father.

"This is a real bit of news," I say, smiling; "good news too," I add, though the words go nigh to choke me. We are walking on again slowly, beneath the great ash trees that spread black skeleton arms to the low dun sky.

"Good news has forgotten the road here, I think, Nell, for this long and many a day," says my father, with a weary sigh. I look down and fumble with the lowest button of my jacket.

"Sir Hugh Lancaster has been here again to-day," I say, in a coy, low voice. My father stops suddenly, and leans both hands on the top of his stick.

"Has he?" he says, eagerly; "is your news about him, Nell?"

I blush.

"Yes, he asked me to marry him; or I'm not sure that it was not I that asked him to marry me," I say, with rather dreary merriment; "anyhow, we settled it between us: it is to be!"

"Thank God!" says my father, very reverently,



under his breath; "then there'll be somebody to take care of my little lass when I'm gone!"

"Is it good news, dad? did I say true?" I ask, throwing a pair of loving young arms about his neck, and laughing hysterically.

"That it is!" he says, heartily, and the strength seems to have come back into his voice. "I can say, 'Nunc dimittis,' with all my heart *now*, Nell; I could not have departed quite in peace before, when I thought of leaving my little Nell to be a poor little ill-used governess; but now," he said, with a dash of his old pride, "she'll be able to hold up her head among the best in the county, as she ought, God bless her!"

"What good will it do me to hold up my head as high as Haman's, if you're not by to see it and be glad of it?" I ask, desolately. Long dreary years, forty, fifty, sixty perhaps, flash before my mind's eye, years of a bondage whose full horrors my innocent young soul but vaguely takes in; years *with* Hugh, and *without* papa.

Oh, why could not I die of consumption, like that girl I took the jelly to yesterday? Why could not I cough myself out of the world, as she was doing so fast? "On the — th instant, at Lestrange Hall, Eleanor, younger daughter of Sir Adrian Lestrange, of rapid decline, aged nineteen." And Dick would see it in the *Times*, and be compunctious, and his grand deep eyes would fill with remorseful tears, and he would rush away to the wars — those vague wars of which I always had so convenient a stock in my mental *repertoire* — and die, covered with wounds, and kissing my photograph.

This was the gloomy form my castle-building took



now; a picturesque death was the only thing I seemed to have strength to long for.

"Nell," says my father, breaking in upon a paragraph descriptive of Dick's glorious demise, in

"Wild Mahratta battle,"

that I was composing, "Do you remember my reading 'King Lear' to you once?"

"Yes," I reply, wondering a little, "long ago; and you used to call me your little Cordelia; I remember."

"Well, darling," he says, with a pensive little smile, "do you remember what Kent says when the poor old King is dead —

"He hates him that would on the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer."

"Oh, dad! dad!" I cry in the bitterness of my soul, clinging about him. "Why cannot you take me with you? Oh, we have been such friends, haven't we? Oh, you're not going to leave me behind!"

"Hush, hush!" says he, soothingly, patting my hot wet cheek. "What will the fine new lover say if we let you wash all the colour out of your eyes with crying? God knows best, Nell! God knows best! we must try and think that!"

"I cannot think it," I say, desperately, "and I won't; I don't believe it."

After that we walk along in silence to the hall-door; I saying over and over to myself, in utter heart sickness, "He doesn't know best! He doesn't! He doesn't!" madly dashing myself like a little foolish useless wave against the great adamant rock of the Omnipotent Will.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

"A still small voice spake unto me,  
Thou art so full of misery,  
Were it not better not to be?"

Is there any one among us, who, at some moments of their lives, has not heard that voice asking them this despairing question? Is there any one who, at some moment or other, has not been tempted to answer "Yes, far, far better?" Is there any one, whoever thinks at all, who has not had black minutes and hours — minutes and hours when he is tempted to say blankly, hopelessly to himself, "There is no God: there can be no beneficent Deity to love us and take care of us, or he never would let us be so very, very desolately wretched." Sometimes we feel tempted to curse God and die; it would be such a relief to us; curse God, as Job's wife is supposed to have urged her much enduring lord to do, as a cure for his boils; that is, if she did not urge him to *bless* God and die, as the word has either signification: in which case the poor woman's character for piety has been shamefully taken away for the last three or four thousand years.

Sometimes we say to ourselves that surely some malevolent tricky demon must have the world's government reins in his fiend hands — some demon who delights in thwarting our poor little plans, in inventing new and ingenious diseases to rack our poor patient bodies. Our very wishing anything seems to drive the object wished for farther away; our very dreading anything seems to draw the dreaded object magnetically nearer. In every newspaper we take up, we see "me-



lancholy suicides," "horrible murders," "fatal accidents," "economic funeral companies;" and often we lay it down with a dull numb feeling that the world is all out of joint; all discord and jangling dissonance.

But there is a Book, a simple, old-fashioned eloquent Book, which tells us that "the fashion of this world passeth away!" the fashion — the old, old fashion that we are all so weary of — the fashion of being wicked, and being sick and disappointed and heart-sore; and whoso believeth that it is so passing, straightway there is to him harmony and peace and order. Never through all the monotonous self-repeating centuries, during which this old globe has gone lumbering round the sun, has there been an instance of instinct misleading any of the creatures in which it has been planted; and as surely as some inner voice whispers to the swallows, telling them when it is time for them to come flying over the foamy green seas to the English spring trees and fresh fields, so surely does some higher instinct, proportioned to our higher, nobler nature, bid us plume our wings for a flight, when life's winter is over, to some distant spring land, where great melody and sweet health and content are awaiting for us; some land where "all crooked things shall be made straight, and all rough places be made smooth." But great sorrows are in their nature like mountains, closing in the horizon, preventing our catching a glimpse of any of the fields, where

"You scarce can see the grass for flowers,"  
of the summer waves tumbling and joyfully tossing up red sea-tang on sunlit yellow sands, of feathery larch woods, and blue rushing brooks, that there may be, that we know are, beyond them.



I seemed now in my complete life-hatred and bitterness to be prisoned in some narrow black valley — some deep gulley between great frowning granite peaks. I could not climb up their smooth slant sides, to see the sunrise washing the low morning clouds, and the gray morning billows with his flamy streams. I was groping with hands stretched out before me blindly, among the boulders and the pitfalls, and the sullen black pools in the valley bottom; and I must stay groping there as I felt, till the oil of my life's lamp were burned out, till I sat down and died there amid the darkness and the doleful beasts and the murky stagnant waters.

"If," thought I, "I had been an old roué of seventy, who had dedicated all my threescore and ten years to the debasing of soul and body, I could hardly have incurred more woful penalties than my nineteen summers of insipid innocence had drawn upon my devoted head." Not even the consciousness of having made a sacrifice which raised me (at least in my own estimation) to a level with the Jewish maiden I have before alluded to; not even the consciousness of having been "high heroical" supported me much. I did not grudge the sacrifice I had made; if it had to be done over again, I should do it over again; but I thought myself entitled to make as many wry faces over it as I felt inclined, and their name was legion.

One day, Dolly entering, cat-like, in her long, straight serge gown, found me grovelling — lying all along on the floor, prone, while tears rushed in rivers from my foolish blue eyes, and laid the dust on the carpet.

"Are you dead, Nell?" she asks quietly, holding



the door in her hand; "because if so, I'll send for the coroner."

"No," say I, blubbering noisily, and burrowing still farther into the dim blue squares of the old Kidderminster. "Worse luck — I wish to Heaven I was!"

"Are your bowels yearning still over the big wax doll?" she asks, jeeringly. "Have you retired into your chamber to weep there?"

"Yes," I say, angrily, lifting up my head, and pushing back my wet, fuzzy locks; "and since it is *my* chamber, and not yours —"

"You'd thank me to 'absquatulate,' as the Yankees say," interrupts she, laughing and showing the sweetest, shortest, whitest little set of teeth that ever set dentist at defiance. "Well, I will in a minute; but 'I have an errand unto thee, oh, captain.'"

"I wish your errand was to tell me that I was going to be hanged, or that you were; I'm sure I don't know which would give me the most gratification," growl I, squatting still Job-like in the ashes.

"You're a little fool, my sweet Nell," says my sister, playfully. "I don't believe you'd relish a bit of whipcord round your little neck any more than I should; but really," she went on, gravely, "I wonder you have not more spirit than to be boohooing about that scoundrelly longlegs. If any man had served me such a turn," she said, clenching her right hand into a small white ball, while her sleepy eyes woke up into beautiful fierce life, "I might have killed him, put a pinch of strychnine into his tea, or stabbed him in the back on the sly — indeed, I'm sure I should; but cry over him, put my finger in my mouth and pipe my eye,



never, never, never!" (a *crescendo* scale, ending in *fortissimo*).

"If you talk of meanness," I cry, springing to my feet and stamping, "I wonder what can be meaner than selling yourself like a bale of goods or a barrel of beer, as I'm doing. Oh, what do I care how mean I am! What sin is there so big that I would not commit it this minute, and commit it most gladly too, if I could but have him back here this minute in this room. Oh, he has not forgotten me! I know it! I know it! There's some mistake, I'm sure, and I shall find it out when it's too late."

I fling myself down again, and cry aloud; my punishment seems greater than I can bear. Dolly walks to the window and looks out.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" I groan, "where are you? where are you? Oh, my darling, are you dead? Oh, come back to me, for God's sake!"

I forget even Dolly's sneering presence, I forget my father, forget everything but that one man who made earth first heaven — then hell for me!

Dolly goes to the wash-hand-stand and pours some cold water into a basin.

"Stop crying," she says, harshly; "you have made your bed, and you must lie on it. Sir Hugh is here again — of course he has a right to come now; and you'd better try and bathe the swelling and redness out of your eyes, if we are to get any money out of him. You don't look a choice morsel to bribe any man with as you are now."

Her cold voice calls me back to myself. I rise and pick up my heavy cross, and prepare to stagger along a little farther under it. I sponged and mopped



my face, and scrubbed it with a Turkish towel, and then I looked in the glass; and then I mopped and scrubbed again, and tried to persuade myself that I did not look as if I had been crying.

Half an hour after I am sitting on the green settee by the library fire, with the gentleman by whose library fire I am to sit through my life, with what patience I may.

His arm is round my waist, and he is brushing my eyes and cheeks and brow with his somewhat bristly moustache as often as he feels inclined — for am I not his property? Has not he every right to kiss my face off if he chooses, to clasp me and hold me, and drag me about in whatever manner he wills, for has not he bought me? For a pair of first-class blue eyes warranted fast colour, for ditto superfine red lips, for so many pounds of prime white flesh, he has paid down a handsome price on the nail, without any haggling, and now if he may not test the worth of his purchases, poor man, he *is* hardly used! As for me, I sit tolerably still, I am not yet actually sick, and that is about all that can be said of me. Presently the situation becomes too warm for me.

"May I move a little, please?" I say, edging away out of my owner's arms. "I'm rather — rather hot, please — the fire, I mean."

"All right," says he, cheerily; "it *is* a fire to roast an ox, isn't it? let's move the settee back a bit, and then we shall be all serene — shan't we, love?"

So we move the settee back into the shade, where the fire-glow cannot reach us, but my blood does not grow any the cooler, for that accursed, girdling arm is



still round me — my buyer's arm — that arm which seems to be burning into my flesh like a brand.

"Jolly this, isn't it?" whispers Strephon, chuckling; "and it'll be jollier still when we're married; it'll be *always* like this then."

*When we're married!* Merciful Heavens! If the prologue is so terrible, *what will the play be?*

"If you please," I begin again meekly; "I — I think I'd rather sit on a chair by myself; you — you — hurt me, rather."

I remove myself, unopposed, to a distant chair, and breathe freer.

"I thought you promised you'd try and like me, Nell," says Hugh, rather ruefully, by-and-by.

"I *will* try, I will indeed," I cry, eagerly, clasping my hands, "only — oh do, *do* give me time!"

"Give you time, indeed," says Strephon, grimly, glancing at his own weather-beaten face in the glass; "all very fine, but I have not so much time to give. By the time you have made up your mind whether you like me or not, I shall be a drivelling old fool, past caring for any woman's liking."

I answered him to never a word, I agreed with him so fully as to his great age.

"One would think," pursues he, stalking up and down in a fume, "to hear you talk, that I had a hump-back, or a club foot, or some great natural deformity;" and then he steps before me, and says with a certain rough pathos in his voice, "Won't you tell me, Nell, what there is about me so repugnant to you, that I may try and mend it?"

A terror seizes me; beaked Israelitish faces swarm before my mind's eye; am I recklessly tossing away



salvation in the shape of those signed checks on Coutts' Bank, that are lying in simple beauty on the table.

"Don't talk nonsense," I cry, pettishly, giving my head a little ill-humoured jerk; "when did I say there was anything about you repugnant to me? Cannot you understand that it is not so easy to get fond of a person all in a minute, when you have not been thinking of anything of the kind before. I told you I'd try and like you, and I will: what more can I say? Oh please, *please* have patience with me!" I cried, piteously.

"Haven't I been patient already?" he asks sorrowfully. "I'm not an impatient fellow ever; it isn't my nature. I don't expect to sow and reap the same day, but I don't know how it is, you seem to like me less and less every time I come."

No answer: a guilty head hangs down low, lower, till it droops on a guilty breast.

"If," says Hugh, quite gently, though his honest face is working a little, as with some strong smothered emotion, "you feel that you can never have anything but a bare toleration of me, say so at once, child. I'm old enough and strong enough to bear a little disappointment; we can't expect to have everything our own way in this world, and I know I'm not quite the right cut to take a girl's fancy; it would be better you should speak out, while it's time, than that we should make each other miserable for all our lives."

I gaze long and earnestly into the fire, before I answer; watch the little firescapes crumbling, dissolving, and reforming, while my hot white hands twist and wrench and generally maltreat each other. Shall I



take him at his word? Oh God! how delicious it would be; it would be like exchanging the fetid stifling air of an eastern dungeon for the free gales rioting under the blue April heavens.

Shall I get off the altar, where, *à la* Jephtha's daughter, I am lying bound; slip the cords off my wrists, and walk lightly away? Shall I still be able to think of that laughing *debonair* glorious face, without stabs of despair — of those strong arms where I may yet find Heaven, without deadly sin? Shall I defy the might of Israel? Shall I let the "hexecoo-tion" have its way? Shall I kill my old dad? *Never*. For him I have begun this great sacrifice; for him I will complete it; for him I will rather perish. So I speak quite firmly, even though I feel myself paling to the lips — Sir Hugh's lips.

"No, I have said it, and I mean to stick to it; let us try and make the best of one another; it's a very puzzling world, and it's very hard to know how to live through it; but I suppose if we try to do our best, it'll all come right in the end."

So I, in my despair.

Then he says, with some difficulty, and flushing scarlet, despite his nine lustres —

"If you're only marrying me on account of that dirty money —"

I interrupt him, hastily.

"Nonsense," I cry, "say no more about it; I mean to be your wife, and I suppose we shall manage to scratch on pretty much as other people do." But to my own heart I say that "I would that I were dead!"

---



## CHAPTER XXX.

THERE is a great sacrifice to the fore; a hecatomb offered at the altar of filial affection; a pretty white lamb is being led out, be-figged, be-ribboned, be-filleted to the slaughter. Pipe and tabor go too-tooing before her, and the butcher, with his sharp knife gleaming, walks behind her. But the lamb knows that she is going to the sacrifice, and she bleats very piteously.

Now for the key to this graceful metaphor. I am the lamb, Hugh is the butcher, Dolly is the pipe and tabor, and the slaughter is our nuptials. I had looked upon our marriage as a distant possible evil, huge and horrible indeed, but rendered indistinct and vague by extreme distance; much as we look upon the Day of Judgment, or the day of our death, and lo! here it was at the very doors.

One day, very meekly and diffidently, for he began to perceive that his turtle-dove had not much coo in her, Sir Hugh suggested that there was no possible reason why our marriage should be delayed; that there was, on the contrary, every reason why it should be hastened. But mild and deferential as was the poor fellow's mode of address, I blazed out upon him; thrust the idea miles away from me, and snubbed him for his want of feeling, in talking of marrying and giving in marriage, when my father was in the state he then was. That was in the morning; in the afternoon my father repeated Sir Hugh's very words almost.

The daily walk had been given up by this time;



all day long my old man sat in his leathern arm-chair, waiting — waiting. The pitcher was breaking very fast now; it would go but few more journeys to the fountain.

All day nearly, I sat beside him on a low stool, holding his hand, kissing it every now and then, and watering it with tears, as the Magdalen did that tender God-hand, that is stretched out ever to heal all wounds.

“‘I’m wearing awa’, Jean,  
Like snaw when it’s thaw, Jean,  
I’m wearing awa’, Jean,  
To the Land o’ the Leal,’”

says my father softly, brokenly; for speech is getting difficult, breathless to him. “It’s rather hard work, Nell, ‘wearing awa’; I wish I could be quicker about it.” My hot tears and kisses fall on the worn hand I must so soon lose for ever, but I cannot answer him in words. “Hugh is a good fellow, isn’t he?” says my father, presently. “I like to think of his being so fond of my little girl; I wish you and he were married, Nell!”

“Do you, Dad?” I say, choking.

“Yes, little lass, and then he could take you home and comfort you, when I’m gone!”

“Cold comfort, I think, Dad,” I say, laying my russet head on the arm of his chair, “but if — if it’ll give you any pleasure, I’ll marry him to-morrow.” And this was how it came about.

“The Queen laid her white throat on the block  
Quietly waiting the fatal shock.”

The parson has been advertised, the licence and the ring have been bought, and we are to be made



one, as fast as bell, book, and candle can make us. How sound I slept on the night before my bridal; people going to be hanged, or guillotined, or beheaded, always do, they say. I slept, and I had a very fair dream; a vague sweet dream of flowers — great, beautiful flowers, crimson and white and azure, and of a garden. And among the flowers, and in the garden, I saw Dick; saw him in all his beauty; saw

“The knotted column of his throat,  
The massive square of his heroic breast,  
And arms on which the standing muscle sloped;”

saw him coming quickly over the springy green turf to meet me, with a great glory of sunshine about his stately head; and I stretched out eager arms towards him, and cried, I'm coming, love, I'm coming!” and so crying, I woke to find myself embracing the empty air; woke as Nelly Lestrangle for the last time in my life.

“This is my wedding day.” With what trembling rapture, with what shy shrinking from her own great passionate joy, has many a girl said this. I felt no tremor, no shyness; only a huge loathing, an infinite despair! One forgets to be coy and maidenly, when one's every pulse and nerve is thrilling with a mighty horror; when, loving one man frenziedly, one is about to be delivered over, bound to the tender mercies of another.

No friends came together to see me wed; there was no sound of mirth or music about the dim old rooms: this was no time for merry-making, when the head of the Lestranges was nearing his last dark home. This ceremony was, we all felt, but the precursor of a more solemn, sadder one. Only one uncle, a selfish



bachelor colonel, had been drawn down reluctant, from his clubs and his comfortable chambers in the Albany, into the murk, wintry country, to give me away.

Eleven o'clock was the hour, at which the poor lamb's throat was to be cut; the female martyr ascend the pyre. As the time drew near, Dolly and Mrs. Smith and Mary the housemaid, all came bustling and fussing about me, in my little shabby, chill chamber; giving a tweak here, and a pull there, and a jerk somewhere else, to one or another of my wedding garments, as seemed good in their eyes. I, meanwhile, stood gazing stonily at myself in the glass. I was dressed in a white muslin gown, as simple as a nun's, a white cloak and a little white bonnet, and I looked as like a snow-drop as possible; as fair, as cold, as passionless. My face was not distorted and blurred with tear marks now; my tears seemed all shed: I had been a spendthrift of them lately.

To-day I could not have wept to save my life. A very miserable-looking face the looking-glass gave back to me, but a very lovely one, as I could not help seeing: lovelier in its colourless, hopeless wistfulness, with its great blue eyes, and its ruddy billowing hair, than even Dolly's in its subtle Eastern sweetness.

"I'm worth my price," I say to myself, bitterly.

Then they get me downstairs somehow, and into the Noah's ark of the family coach. As we drive along to the church, I sit staring blankly before me, while my uncle, the Colonel, a little withered spick-and-span cock-sparrow, chirrups small old-world *poli-tesse*s to Dolly, whom he thinks "a monstrous fine



woman, egad,"—his style of commendation savouring of the Regency—and who takes them suavely, honiedly, as she would take the vilest, most opprobrious epithets ever applied to woman to-day, being, forsooth, in highest good humour.

The air is full of snow; flakes are sailing crookedly down to join the other flakes lying already on tree, and hedgerow, and field. There seems no horizon to-day, no definite boundary to the prospect—sky and earth are mixed and jumbled up together; it is freezing and thawing, freezing and thawing every five minutes.

At the lych gate we get out. My uncle gives me his arm, and leads me up the narrow gravel walk, where half a dozen perished school-children, three blue-nosed pinched old women, and a purple hobble-dehoy are assembled as witnesses of this gay show. There is a thin white shroud stretched over the sloping green mounds, thin and scant as a beggar's cloak; the snow has dropped her chill pure pall over the quiet dead as they lie slumbering together in families and households.

Sir Hugh—*my* Sir Hugh, my own—and his best man, the large-headed young cotton lord, met us at the church door; Sir Hugh in a blue frock-coat, a blue tie, and a red-brown countenance, which all set each other off very nicely.

"There was colour in his cheek,  
There was lustre in his eye,"

and there was a bouquet as big as a hay-stack in his hand, a bouquet of delicatest hot-house ferns and whitest hot-house flowers, flowers waxiest of petal and heaviest of scent. This posy he immediately presented to me,



and Lord Stockport, of the many mills, did likewise with a lesser haystack to Dolly. I said, "thank you," coldly, took it and held it in my hand, without its ever occurring to me to smell it or notice it any further.

Then we arranged ourselves before the altar. Of course, Hugh disposed himself on the wrong side of me, and had to be pushed, and nudged, and scolded into his right place. Then Mr. Bowles, whose long nose was redder than a plume reft from the flamingo's wing, and whose teeth I heard like castanets played by a skilful hand, opened the prayer-book, and began to tie the first loop of the Gordian knot. I paid but small heed to his exhortation; my eyes kept wandering from Sir Adrian Lestrangle, who "*obdormivit in pace, ætat 26,*" in gray marble at my right, to Sir Brian, who "departed this life in the 24th year of his age," in white marble at my left. *He* was deeply regretted; Sir Adrian was *not* apparently. We were not a long-lived family, any of us.

"I require and charge you both, as ye shall answer at the dreadful Day of Judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed," said the Rev. Bowles.

He read at a hand-gallop, and very much through his nose, but, try as he would, he could not take quite all the dignity and awe out of that solemnest adjuration. It called back my straying thoughts; it stirred my apathy. The cold, vault-like air crept through my thin clothing, and chilled the marrow of my bones; and a colder, bitterer chill grasped at my heart, as I listened to the grave, grand words.

Then Sir Hugh was asked whether he would "take this woman to be his wedded wife," and he said, "I



will," in his strong bass voice, heartily, loud, out, as if he meant it, and as if he was glad to be asked. And the same question was put to me with regard to "this man," and I said "I will" also; but said it with as much life and animation as a doll shows when she opens her eyes, the string at her side being pulled.

So he, Hugh de Vere, takes me, Eleanor, "till death us do part," and I, Eleanor, take him, Hugh de Vere, and do it with a bad grace, as if I would not have taken him if I could have helped it, and then Hugh put the ring — pledge of a worse than Egyptian bondage — over my cold, reluctant fingers, and the bells clashed out, and we were man and wife, and I knew that now I could reach my darling's arms only through the billows of sin or the floods of death.

The deed being done, and Mr. Bowles having made his congratulations as intelligibly as his chattering teeth would allow him, we signed our names — Hugh de Vere Lancaster, very bold and firm; Eleanor Lestrangle, very wobbly and illegible; and then Hugh hurried me off into his brougham, which was waiting at the gate.

"Heaven tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," says the proverb, and I thanked Heaven devoutly that that drive was but a short one. During it I spoke not a word; if I had attempted to utter, I felt that I should have shrieked aloud in my great agony.

I find my father in the hall, come out to welcome back his little daughter. He has put his old Sunday coat on to do me honour — the coat that I remember so many years, and which is so much too big for him now, hangs about him in such pitiful folds and wrinkles.

I throw myself passionately into his arms.

"Kiss me, dad — kiss me!" I cry, a little wildly.



"I don't feel like myself to-day, somehow. I'm *your* Nell still — aren't I? — though I *am* married."

My father holds out his hand to Sir Hugh, and smiles his pleasant, tender smile.

"She has been made such a pet of all her life, you see," he says, with gentle apology.

(Death is smoothing all the little asperities out of him, dear noble old father.)

"She has been her old father's spoilt child — haven't you, Little Nell? You'll be good to her — won't you? She has been a very loving little daughter to me, and they say good daughters always make good wives — don't they?"

Then he stops, out of breath.

"I will be good to her, indeed, Sir Adrian," says Hugh, solemnly, "so help me, God!"

And he has been good to me, honest fellow — he has kept his word.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

I MAY put away all the bright colours out of my paint box, for they have gone out of my life; so I need no longer lake, or carmine, or ultra-marine. My few more pictures are dark as Rembrandt's; without his forges, and fires, and patches of crimson light to set them off. I made but one stipulation with my husband; and it was that immediately after the ceremony he should return to Wentworth, *en garçon*, and leave me in peace, to tend and nurse my father, until — I did not express in words, until what; hardly to myself did I dare give shape and substance to my woe — until the end. I had sacrificed myself, in order to prolong



my old man's life, and on the day but one after my wedding, he died.

Thus it is with our little feeble plans and designs, in this troublesome world. The sacrifice had been offered in vain. I have told you how strenuously my father opposed all endeavours to make an invalid of him. Well, on that last day he had to succumb: the stout spirit had to give in to the failing flesh; One, mightier than he, overcame him.

So he lay in bed, very quietly, very patiently, waiting, waiting, and panting sorely. During all those dragging, weary hours, I sat by him, holding his hand; as if *that* could keep him back from the gulf he was nearing! The snow floated down noiselessly on the window-sill, and rested there, soft and flaky: the clock ticked monotonous, and the short wintry day sloped westward towards the night.

"It's all up with me, Nell," said my father, faintly; "I'm getting a very broken-winded old horse, aren't I?"

By-and-by I got mother's old Bible, with her dim faded pencil-marks; the shabby little Bible he always used; and read him bits out of it; comfortable, tender promises suited to the weakness of approaching dissolution; and he said:

"Thank you, little lass, it's very nice;" but he could not attend to me long. It is hard work dying; a bitter weary tussle; but ah! surely it is harder seeing another die. I sat and listened to the gasping breath, that grew ever quicker, harder, shorter; it made me out of breath myself to hear him labouring, panting so. O God! how I longed to be able to

"Give him half my powers,  
To eke his being out."



Then day died, and the snow lay thicker, and the darkness fell. Presently Mrs. Smith came in with ostentatious tiptoe tread, and came creaking over, with a cup of tea for me, and turned away with big tears on her old cheeks (there were none on mine). And then the doctor came in, with long face, and lowered voice, and told me he was sinking fast — God! as if I did not know that — and poured out some brandy into a glass for me to give him. But I said I would not, rudely, angrily; pushed it away from me; told them he should die in peace, and that they should not torment him — I hated to see that careless indifferent stranger come to gape and croak over him, in his mortal weakness.

So they left me and my old man alone together, we had always loved to be together, hadn't we? The wind rose a little at nightfall, and came sighing, sobbing, *keening*, about the old eaves and gables, and the snow turned to sleet, and beat and pattered against the panes. It seemed so hard to die on such a night; so hard for a poor bare soul to go shuddering out into the great dark void. I could have let him go from me better, I thought, on some bright warm summer nooning, when you could almost see heaven's gates a long way up in the azure depths.

Gradually he sank into a stupor; He who does all things well, took away from him all knowledge of past, present, and to come; all consciousness of his pains and aches; of his debts and his sorrows, and even of his little pet daughter, kneeling by his bedside, with her head in the counterpane, choking and shaking in her sobs.

The night deepened, waned; the candles flared tall



and yellow, and the wind sank: still I knelt on, holding the hand that was ever growing colder, colder, with my eyes riveted on that sunken face, that looked so old, so gray, and so very peaceful. I was learning off every pathetic line and hollow in it; printing it on my icy desolate heart, against the time when I should have but memory left of him.

The breathing had grown fainter, fainter; sometimes it paused quite, for a second or two, then laboured on for a space, intermittent, feeble; the pauses grew longer — longer; the gasps lower — weaker — weaker — then stopped! And about the fourth watch of the night came One into that upper chamber — One that had not been there before. A great quiet awe stole over me: I rose from my knees very gently, reverently, and bent over him.

“He is gone!” I said to myself — when suddenly the old kind eyes opened once again *wide*, with an infinite glad surprise in them, as if they saw some pleasant jocund sight — My old man! God grant that it was so! — and then the eyelids closed again very softly — and he was not!

So the family vault of the Lestranges was opened, and the good gray head went down into the dust, whither all heads go at last. I hope they’ll bury me with him when I die. I should like that last grand trumpet-blare to find us together. And they carried him away — *him*, that dead confined weight — ah! not *him*, not *him*, really — away from his pretty old house, and his books, and his wretchedest, wretchedest “little lass.” As they bore him slowly under the great elms, beneath whose shade he and I had so often walked, holding sweet converse, the snow fell heavy



and thick, whitened the black pall, and sent its feathery, icy flakes against my face, as I walked behind. I ought to have cried, I suppose, that day; Dolly did; even Mrs. Smith and the other servants did; and I looked at them with a certain stolid surprise. I did not cry; I was not the least inclined; I felt no particular pain or grief, only an infinite, numb apathy. So they bore him through the lych gate, and into the church, and we said the solemn good-by words to him — he lying there deaf, unheeding of our farewells; and then they laid him in the yawning grave (we standing round), and the snow-flakes fell on the coffin-plate, that told how Sir Adrian Lestrangle departed this life on the 30th day of December, 186—. And then we turned away and left him, and I was sorry as one that had no hope.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

"I remember, I remember  
The house where I was born,  
The little window where the sun  
Came peeping in at morn.  
It never came a wink too soon,  
Nor brought too long a day,  
But now I often wish the night  
Had borne my breath away."

WHEN next the sun comes peeping through my little dim-paned window, he will find no Nelly Lestrangle to greet him. He will miss the girl whom he has watched grow up from a little toddling pinafores child, to a fair, tall, comely woman — will miss the happy, foolish innocent face that has smiled back to him across the hay-field, on so many dewy June morn-



ings. Nelly Lestrangle, with her light heart, her tumble-down Spanish castles, and her silly little tender jokes, has gone away, not from that room only, but from the world.

They buried her yesterday in that dull chamber, where Death is holding his carnival among the Lestranges, and have left only a very heavy-hearted Nell Lancaster in her stead.

I am sitting in my father's bed-room, on the floor; by the bed whereon he died, and am kissing it. God has vouchsafed to me to-day the gift of tears. After he was dead, when the warmth was gone out of the heart that would have bled less, had it been colder, when his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him, I had cut off a bit of his hair, and now the sight of the thin gray lock, so sparse, so almost white, recalled to me with such bitter force the head from which it was severed, that he, being dead, yet spake. Oh God! is there any verse that ever was penned by mortal fingers which grasps so at the universal sympathies of this whole tearful world, as this: —

“Oh Christ! that it were possible  
For one short hour to see  
The souls we loved, that they might tell us  
What and where they be!”

Before, when my old man had gone away from me, though he was beyond the reach of my fond arms, beyond the province of the eye and the ear, I could yet picture him to myself amongst familiar human surroundings; could imagine him sitting and walking, making his kindly jests, and talking his clever pointed talk; *now* the vagueness and the doubt rebuffed me.



So far as I had gone with him, he had had a good journey, thank God! for he had parted from me smiling; but alas! that was but a very little way on. I could but take him to the great gates, and send him out into the night, and stand peering with eager aching eyes after him, as he went forth into the blackness *alone*.

It is afternoon, and, but for the servants, I am alone in the house. Hugh is gone over to Wentworth, whence he is to return later to fetch me, and Dolly is gone. Dolly has been very busy all the morning, going about the house, and picking up a little bit of china here, and a little bit of plate there. She has no particular right to them, although she says very feelingly, that 'poor dear papa' gave them to her, and so of course she cannot bear the idea of their being put up to sale for any dreadful common creatures; but when a house is in the confusion attendant upon an owner lately dead, a little petty larceny is excusable, almost laudable.

Half an hour ago, she set off on a long visit to some of her numerous friends; she made a very pretty exit, crying a little, but not enough to disfigure herself at the railway station, and shaking hands with all the servants. I have cried myself into a state of semi-insensibility; my head is resting on the counterpane, and my lock of hair is lying in silver paper on my lap, when the door opens, and Mrs. Smith says, very gently, "If you please, my lady, Sir Hugh's come back."

If I had thought about it, I should have recollected that there was nobody but myself in the room; but somehow it never occurred to me to take the un-



familiar appellation to myself. Mrs. Smith comes a little further into the room, and repeats a tone or two louder:

"If you please, my lady, Sir Hugh's come and would like to speak to you." I stare up at her, *dully* scared for a minute; then jump up, throw my arms about the old woman's neck, and lay my head on her kindly bosom.

"Don't call me *that!*" I say, whispering; "don't! I hate it; call me Miss Nell *always*; do you mind?" Mrs. Smith kisses my swollen face, and strokes my disordered hair; it was homely, but very lovingly done, as Sir Thomas More said of the maid Dorothy Collis, who embraced him as he went to execution.

"I'll call you what you like, my dear, in course; but indeed — indeed you should not take on so; it's not right, it *is* not indeed. It was the Almighty's will as he was took," she says, very shakily, "and, oh dear! he has been worritted a deal, poor gentleman; I don't think you had oughter wish him back!"

"I don't! I don't!" I cry, sobbing hysterically; "I'm not so cruel! do you think I'm a *fiend*; but I only wish they'd — let me — let me — go to him; it's not wicked to say that, is it?"

"Not a bit wicked!" says Mrs. Smith, soothingly, "and so you will in the Lord's good time; so we all shall, I 'ope; and for my part so as we was prepared, I don't much care how soon." Hugh, manlike, is getting impatient. I hear him calling

"Nell! Nell!"

It is not the same voice that was wont to come ringing up these stairs; it is a younger, stronger, commoner one; the contrast comes coldly home to my heart.



"I don't want to see him," I say, pitifully, to Mrs. Smith, and speaking as if I had a very bad cold in my head; "go and ask him to give me half an hour more."

Mrs. Smith looks mild disapprobation.

"Nay, my dear, I don't think you had oughter keep him waiting; he's your 'usband, you know, and he raly is as good a gentleman as ever trod shoe-leather; we cannot expect everybody to be like them as is gone."

I have been rather meek and bidable from my youth up, so I go. Hugh is standing at the foot of the stairs, whistling very softly to himself; it is almost as inveterate a habit with him, as with Mr. Chick.

"What a figure you have made of yourself, you poor little girl!" he says, surveying rather ruefully, the purple-eyed, red-nosed, hollow-cheeked prize that he has acquired.

"I cannot help it!" I say, doggedly. "Do you want me? Mrs. Smith said you did."

"I'd walk on my head from here to Wentworth, if it would do you any good," he says, disregarding my question, and looking sympathetic, as a really good-natured man would in the presence of a grief which it was equally beyond his power to measure or assuage; "but you really ought not to fret like this; you'll be laid up, and you know it's — it's *Godalmighty's will*."

Hugh is very shy of pronouncing his Creator's name, and now does it with a jerk, running the three words into one very rapidly. I don't feel much consoled by the information, and go and sit down listlessly, on the end of the servant's prayer bench. I have eaten nothing all day, and am as weak as a cat.



"What time will you be ready to start?" asks Hugh, seeing that his theological gun has missed fire.

"Oh, must we go yet?" I cry, clasping my hands in despair, "I wanted to bid good-by to all the old place!"

Hugh looks down and pulls his grizzling moustache.

"The days are so short, you see," he says, "and it takes two hours to get there; I don't want to bring the horses in hot; and mother will be getting anxious if we are not back by dinner-time!"

"How soon then?" I ask, giving up the point as I would give up any point to-day.

"Well, as soon as you can pop on your bonnet then. I'll go to the stables and tell him to put the horses to; they're uncommon likely to take cold if they stay there long, for it's as damp as a —" *Vault*, he was going to say, but it occurred to him, that, under the circumstances, it might sound unfeeling.

I rise and move towards the stairs again, dragging my legs after me.

"Oh, by-the-by, Nell, which would you like to go in? the brougham or the double dog-cart — they are both here?"

"Oh not the dog-cart!" I say with an involuntary gesture of disgust.

"Why? it is not cold!"

"It reminds me of that dreadful day," I say without thinking. (I somehow attribute all my ills to that day.) I was enough to try the patience of the ten best husbands in Britain, wasn't I? but then I was so miserable.

Sir Hugh's kind, good-natured face clouds a little.



"Those were not the same pair," he says, "and the cart cannot run away of itself."

He does not relish the idea of a fourteen mile drive in a stuffy close carriage, with a crying woman; even though she is his bride.

"As you wish," I say, indifferently, "it's all one to me."

So the dog-cart it is, and into it I get; a limp, nerveless figure, on which a great deal of crape is hung, and over whose face a crape veil falls black and thick as a December night. There has been one of those rapid changes in the weather, which are common in our climate, so rich in unpleasant surprises. The snow is all melted out of the sky, and the bitter wind has whistled and moaned itself away to some other quarter of the earth. The air is as warm as April, and the atmosphere that of a vapour bath.

A dank blue mist hangs over the churchyard. It is not raining, and yet the tombstones are all streaming with wet, and great drops hang from the old ash's naked boughs. I strain my neck back as long as the dim gray tower, and the great dripping yews are in sight.

"Good-by, old dad!" I say to myself over and over again, "good-by," and then I cry under my veil, more bitterly than ever.

For the first five miles Hugh leaves me pretty much to my own devices; does not bring "*God-Almighty's-will*" to bear on me again. He makes several remarks of a friendly nature to his horses, urging them to steadiness of conduct, and throws out an inquiry or two as to the mode of their entertainment at Lestrange to the groom.



But he holds his tongue as far as the veiled statue beside him is concerned.

The veiled statue unveils herself presently, and stows away her pocket-handkerchief in her pocket, having exhausted all the tears in her lachrymatory. The lamps are lit, and we go spinning through the darkness — it is quite dark now. Splash! splash! go the horses' hoofs through the mud; a light twinkles here and there cheerily, from a cottage window.

"So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

Immediately, on perceiving this change in the weather, Hugh passes the reins into his right hand, and puts his left arm round me. I am Sir Hugh's lawful wife now; so this proceeding does not amuse the groom so much as it would have done on that former drive; it tickles him a little however.

"That's right, old woman!" says my husband kindly; "cheer up! what's done cannot be undone; but things are never so bad in this world that they might not be worse."

The near horse shies; the arm is withdrawn. "Steady, old boy! steady!"

It is very unwifely of me, but I feel inclined to say *Ta* to that timid quadruped.

"I suppose, Nell," says Hugh — he thinks that now that the ice is broken, a little cheerful conversation will be highly salutary for me — "I suppose, Nell, that poor Dolly has got to her journey's end by now."

"I suppose so."

"How long is she going to stay there? do you know?"



"No."

"What is she going to do with herself afterwards?"

"I don't know." (My tone said "I don't care either.")

"Poor girl! it's very sad for her not having a hole or corner to put her head in!"

"She has lots of friends."

"Oh, ay! *friends* very likely; and people are very glad to have a girl with them for a month, or *two* even; but one cannot *live* on one's friends; that was what she was saying to me this morning. We had a long talk before she went; I don't think I ever was so sorry for any one in my life."

(The objects of compassion which Hugh meets whene'er he takes his walks abroad are few apparently.)

"Did she tell you what her plans were?"

"Well, no! I don't think she had made up her mind; she came to ask my advice, poor thing! and she seemed so cut up too, about this — this — affair," says Hugh, rather at a loss for an expression, and jerking his head vaguely in the direction of my father's death.

"Awfully!" I say, ironically; "I don't suppose she'll ever get over it." Hugh does not heed my sneer. When once he is off on a train of thought, he runs along it like a mad dog; turning neither to the right nor to the left.

"Do you know what my advice was, Nell? I suppose I ought to have asked you first, but I felt sure of not meeting with much opposition from you — the old lady is the only difficulty; she is so *ratchetty* now and then, and always hates new faces, too!"

"What was your advice?" I ask, startled.



"Why to come and keep house with us, till she marries — that'll be sure not to be long first!"

"Oh!" say I, blankly, and my tone is not exultant. Hugh was right just now; there is no state of things so bad but that it may not be worse.

"Seems such a natural arrangement! own sister! — parents dead! — no home!" says Hugh, becoming ejaculatory, and not quite so certain of my approbation as he was five minutes ago.

"It was very kind of you," I say, gently. I feel that I am receiving what he intended as a pleasant surprise for me, rather ungraciously.

"Oh, no! not at all! she is a great ally of mine; she has always been a good friend to me, even in the days when you used to snub me, Nell!"

"Yes."

"Of course, I don't mean to say that my principal motive in asking her, was not that I thought you would be pleased to have such a nice companion, and one that you have been used to all your life too. Mother is all very well in her way, of course — I don't mean to say a word against her — but I should not think that you and she would be likely to have many ideas in common, and of course I cannot be with you all day. There's the farm, you know, and hunting five days a week, and — and —" says poor Hugh, rather discomfited at the ill-success of his little benevolent scheme, and trying to make out the best case he can for himself.

"It was very good of you!" I say again very gratefully; "and what answer did she make?"

Hugh looks rather foolish.

"Oh, poor girl! why I really think she hardly



knew what she was doing; she cried and wanted to go down on her knees to thank me, only of course I could not stand that" (wretched as I am, I laugh grimly to myself, as I picture the little tableau — Dolly going gracefully down on her knees, and poor Hugh in dire confusion hauling her up again; I think if she had reflected that it would in all probability go back to me, she would have refrained from that little bit of melodrama); "and that of course it was a great boon to a poor homeless girl like her, and that she daresay'd she should not trouble us long. I don't know what she meant by that, I'm sure, unless she has got somebody in her eye — and — and that she'd come, I suppose!"

I say "Oh!" again, and the subject drops.

I feel that it would seem unnatural in me to object, and I could as soon fly in the air as express any elation at the intelligence. My legs feel very stiff, and I am weary, as Hugh lifts me down at Wentworth Hall door.

Last time I saw that door, Dick was leaning against it — I don't even think of Dick to-day somehow. I follow Hugh into the library, where lights are blazing and the curtains are drawn, and a tall old lady in black — she has put on complimentary mourning — receives me in her arms, and kissing me, says with prim stateliness, but very kindly withal, "Welcome home, my dear daughter!"

Alas! she is the only person whose daughter I am now.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

THEY tell us, don't they, that one of the mercifullest dispensations of Providence is our facility for forgetting — the ease and quickness with which we get over things? To me it seems that what points the sting of every grief, is the thought that a time will come when we shall grieve no more. It is terrible enough, God wot, for a person to drop out of our lives; but to drop out of our hearts too. Ah, poor dead ones! is not that hard!

As long as their memory is with us fresh and green — as long as it lives with us, as they themselves lived with us, coming in and going out, in the house and in the street, in talk and in silence, on Sundays and on week-days — so long do we seem to keep a little portion of them with us; they do not seem quite gone away from us.

But the same thing happeneth to us all! Strive and resolve as we may to keep our sorrow fresh and new and glossy, it is all to no purpose; it grows insensibly old and stale and shabby, like the crape round our hats. Have not you, oh friends, before now, seeing some acquaintance who had just issued out of great tribulation, laughing and talking, apparently unchanged — have not you said within yourselves — how unfeeling he is! how different I should be!

And lo! the apple of *your* eye is taken away from you, and in a week or two you also are laughing and talking — the river of your life flows on smooth, unruffled, as if that new-made grave were razed out of creation.



"Out of sight, out of mind," is true to a certain extent of all of us. We cannot be always thinking of what we never see: that is the very thing that makes it so difficult for us to rest our minds on heaven, and heaven's high King. We cannot see them, and so we but feebly, transiently realize them.

The people we *see*, who talk to us, and we to them, whom we can hear and touch and feel, gradually fill more and more of that vacant space: the overpowering force of time saps our woes, as a little wave, plashing through long æons, wears and hollows at last the great granite rock.

But oh! we don't forget, really! I don't mean you to think that. The wound heals over slightly; we could not all walk about with great gaping gashes, could we? The world's work could not get done if we did; but beneath the surface that looks all fair and even, there is a great dull ache going on always — an ache that takes the taste out of our life's savoury meats, and makes us call our short day all too long.

A month has gone by — a wintry, sleety, dreary month. People have got tired of talking of Sir Hugh Lancaster's wedding, and Sir Adrian Lestrangle's death. Other men and women have been wed and died since; and new subjects have supplanted those two, which were of intensest interest to but one or at most two people. And there has been a sale at Lestrangle; the old oak chairs and tables have been knocked down to the highest bidder; scattered among the neighbouring sons of Manchester and Liverpool; and the old rooms look strange and piteous and unfurnished without them.



And greasy Jews — the offscouring of the earth (my one point of sympathy with the *moyen âge* barbarians is their loathing and maltreatment of the accursed Israelitish dog) — have been prowling about, trading, as is their wont, on the miseries and weaknesses of poor humanity. And Hugh, good old fellow, has bought the old leathern arm-chair for me: I am sitting in it now; I hope I shall die in it.

I have been transplanted from Lestrange to Wentworth, and the transplantation has not killed me. I am a hardier plant than I thought I was. I don't cry all day, by any means, and I laugh now and then when anything in my husband or his belongings strikes me in a ridiculous light, which is not seldom. I am hungry and eat, I sleep soundly, I still have likes and dislikes, I make jokes occasionally; I squabble about every two days with my mamma-in-law, when she tries to give me lectures on deportment, and *le bon Dieu* still gives me energy to snub Hugh as seemeth good unto me. Do you suppose from this that I accepted my fate meekly, that I was beginning to get reconciled to it? Not I!

My father's death I should have got over in time perhaps: it is natural that parents should go before their children, and I might have got to think of him without torture, with a gentle eternal regret and "*Sehnung*," as the Germans say. I doubt even that; doubt my ever forgetting my old dad even if I had had Dick to kiss away my tears, and supply the place of all other loves by his great passionate one. Now that the first *éclat* and excitement of my sacrifice were over — *now* that I knew for certain that I had slain myself in vain, knew that he for whom I had been

*Infinitely*



offered up was sleeping with his fathers beneath the chancel of Lestrange, never to be wakened by my loudest, most piercing cries, then my misery rose up before me, huge, unnatural, gigantic; more terrible "than ever woman wore." I was like Jonah when his gourd died down. I said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." "Why," I cried, "was I to be picked out from among all women, to be pre-eminently wretched?"

The little worthless earthenware pitcher picked a quarrel with the potter who framed it. I did not love Hugh one bit; it is not easy to love two men at once. To tell you the truth, I did not try much, sometimes I loathed him. And yet he was very good to me, as good as could be. I verily believe that he loved me as much as he could love any created thing; it was not his fault, poor fellow, that he was not made of the finest porcelain, but was only good, useful, ugly Delf. He was not to blame that Providence had made him a little, dark, middle-aged baronet, instead of a great beautiful fair dragoon.

I am sure that he appreciated my varied excellences, and even ruggednesses, as much as man could; and was fully alive to the advantage he had gained in having a pretty young white face opposite to him every day at dinner, instead of an old yellow ugly one. He was a most loving husband; horribly, needlessly, irksomely loving, I said to myself. One has not much power of simulation or dissimulation at nineteen; but I did my best to hide my disrelish for my lord, and to receive his blandishments with as good a grace as I could.

I was his chattel as much as his pet lean-headed



bay mare, and I felt that he had justice on his side. If he might not insinuate his arm round my *waist*, round whose waist might he? Sometimes I will confess to you that I wished he would transfer his amities to some other person, even if it were the cook. I'm sure I should not have been jealous, All Sir Hugh's other servants, if they disliked their situations, or got tired of them, might give warning and leave; but I, however wearied I might get of mine, could never give warning, could never leave. I was a fixture for life. So I said to myself sometimes, and ground my teeth, and snarled like a caged tiger.

I had indulged a mild vague hope that the very words of the marriage ceremony read over me, would have a cabalistic charm to prevent my ever thinking of any man but Sir Hugh, after we were man and wife. I had heard that only very bad wicked women ever cared for anybody but their husbands after they were married, and I hoped I was not a very bad wicked woman.

However, I discovered pretty soon with some chagrin that I must reckon myself among that naughty band; that I was not one of those "who love their lords;" not "a matron of Cornelia's mien." I found that I thought of Dick infinitely more; more regretfully, passionately, longingly, now that I was Lady Lancaster, and it was criminal of me so to think, than I had done as Nelly Lestrangle, when it was only unwise and unworldly. Nor was this mere womanly perversity, hankering after the unattainable; nor did it spring from any idea that it was rather fine to be immoral. I thought of him because I had nothing else pleasant to



think of. The one person who had ever halved my heart with him was gone from me.

I *hated* to think of my father, not having that living faith accorded to some, which enables them to say from their hearts, that their dead ones are "not dead but gone before." My father *was* dead to me, dead as the old dog who died the other day, licking my hand. I *knew* I never should see him again.

How did I know whither he was gone? how did I know whether he had gone to any good place? and if he had, what right had I to think that I should ever rejoin him there? I did not believe in any heaven with sufficient strength to make me strive very strenuously to attain it.

Life seemed to me a great vast chaos, through which men stumbled and tottered to a big black pit at the end. So I thought on the forbidden theme all the day, and sometimes all the night; and truly there was not much at Wentworth to distract my thoughts. A lap-dog would have thought my existence paradise; for I had plenty of the best to eat, and big fires to bask in; but for myself, I thought it a very dull gehenna.

All through the wintry morning I sat on a gilt chair, clad from head to foot in thickest silk and blackest crape, in the yellow drawing-room, every stick of whose ugly furniture spoke to me of *him*; while my mother-in-law knitted socks for her beloved son — she was a thrifty old soul, and would fain have had me do likewise — and narrated to me apocryphal tales of Hugh's extreme beauty in infancy; thrilling anecdotes of his childhood, and of how he caught the measles; of his habits and customs at various periods



of his history; of how often he had broken his collar-bone, &c., &c.

In the afternoon I either went behind the fat coach-horses, to pay solemn calls to neighbouring matrons, accompanied, as before, by our mamma, or else, when it was not a hunting-day, I pottered about the premises with Hugh, heard his horses' pedigrees, and thought, with a frosty chill at my heart, of those other saunters at Lestrange, about shabbier stables, with the dear old man who was not.

Sometimes, but very rarely, I managed to shirk out by myself, to put on the dowdiest cloak and hat I could find, to take off my ring, and dawdle and wander and scramble about the park, and be Nelly Lestrange — in my own eyes at least — once again.

In the evenings, we two women stitched and interchanged amicable nothings or mild sparrings, while Hugh, having bestowed on me such post-cœnal caresses as he felt inclined, went to sleep, and mostly snored.

We were so sitting one evening after dinner — Lady Lancaster, senior, click-clacking away at that eternal knitting; Sir Hugh not quite asleep yet, but reading the *Times* as a narcotic; and Lady Lancaster, junior, toiling unlovingly at a smoking-cap for her master, and glancing now and then from him to his mother, from the lean grizzling head and bristles to the yellow front and wrinkles, and crying out to herself —

“Oh, how sick I am of you both. Oh, if I could but get away — oh, if I only could!”

Then Hugh spoke.

“Mother, do you recollect M'Gregor?”



"M'Gregor, my dear boy? what M'Gregor? — there are so many M'Gregors. There is your poor father's friend, Sir Malcolm, and there's General M'Gregor?"

"No, no," interrupts her son, "none of those old fogies. I mean a big, good-looking fellow that was here last year. Don't you remember?"

"To be sure," says mamma, calmly; "he spilt a cup of coffee over my lavender satin — I had to have the breadth taken out; and I remember remarking that he seemed very attentive to Dorothea Lestrangle. Yes, I remember the young man perfectly."

"Do you happen to recollect the number of his regiment?" says Hugh, who is widely, brilliantly awake by now.

"—th Dragoons," interpose I, breathlessly; "what about him?"

"Nothing, darling," says Benedick, looking at me with lazy rapture, "only I see it's ordered to India."

"Ordered to India!"

I rose and rushed hastily out of the room, very nearly falling foul of the butler, who was bringing in tea, and disconcerting that grave functionary considerably.

Next day, Sir Hugh and his mother went to dine and sleep at a house in the neighbourhood. My deep mourning of course excused me from accompanying them, and a proud woman was I when their backs were fairly turned. I had begged and entreated of my mother-in-law not to stay, or let Hugh stay at home on my account; and she had commended my unselfishness, and had driven off in high good humour with "her boy."



"Thank God!" said I, standing at the hall-door, and watching the carriage lamps go twinkling down the dusky avenue. Then I returned slowly to the saloon, and let my countenance fall into any woe-begone dejected curves it chose, there being nobody by to remark upon them.

"Ordered to India — ordered to India!" Those three words had been dwelling in my ears for the last twenty-four hours ceaselessly; the gilt clock on the mantelpiece seemed to be ticking them now. "Going to India to have his young life scorched away, and I should *never* see him again." It was not that I should not see him again for a year, or for two, or for twenty years, but — *never*. I should never know how, why, or for what other fairer, more lovable woman he had deserted me.

An overpowering, mad longing seized me to go to him to ask him why he had been so cruel to me, to ask him to take me with him to that far sultry land. What did I care how wicked I was? My old man would never know it,

"For he was chill to praise or blame."

It seemed to me, then, that the best thing we can do in this grievous world is to snatch whatever present bliss we may, seeing that the past is all torture and the future all nothingness. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," seemed to me the profoundest philosophy then. "If there is eternal justice somewhere," said I to myself, "why is my punishment so much heavier than my sins? I ask for so little; I don't expect, don't ask to be happy — I only beg for exemption from bitterest, sharpest pain; I only ask for



an easy death and quick annihilation. Oh, to lay down my head in the kindly dust — not in a coffin, a heavy, stifling, dreadful coffin — but in the fresh-scented, dark-brown earth, and with ‘life’s fitful fever’ for ever cooled, sleep on and on, till my body ‘returns to the earth as it was,’ and my spirit — ah, can *it* sleep?”

The fire burnt cheerily; the wax candles shed a soft lustre round them; the old china on mantel-shelf and table and cabinet looked comfortable and snug and homelike; but I felt stifled, choking. I went to the window, opened it, and stepped out into the verandah. A great gust of rain-laden wind comes driving roughly against me, the French window behind me bangs to, and I stand out on the wet flags, and watch the black clouds go scudding, hurrying across the sky, for the moon is up and gives me light. It was not cold, and I felt to breathe freer, leaning my face among the wet ivy, which climbed and twisted round the further pillar of the verandah.

“It was here he kissed me; it was here he took me in his arms,” said I to myself, nestling my head among the dripping green. “I thought I was going to spend my life with him, and now I am alone, alone for evermore! Great God — how unbearable!”

Suddenly there comes a lull between two rain-bursts; the moon comes sweeping out from behind a great cloud shoulder; the Portugal laurel beside me shakes and rustles; and from behind it a man steps out suddenly — steps out into the moonlit gravel walk, where the pebbles are glittering like so many diamonds.

---



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEED I tell you who the man was? For a second, I did not know myself; for a second, I stood paralyzed by terror; then he came close up to me, and I knew him; and a great flood of wicked, wonderful joy streamed into my soul and nearly drowned it; as I looked up at the young giant with the haggard, beautiful, angry face that was stooping over me.

"I have been prowling about like a thief or a poacher," he says, harshly; "I have watched that fellow, your husband, out; I was determined I *would* see you before I went." The cloud rack blots out the moon again; it is very dark.

"Is it you, Dick, *really?*" I say, faltering, and then I push back the window, and the light from fire and candle flashes on him, as he stands there, wet to the skin, big, shaggy, miserable. My heart goes out, with a great yearning pity to him; "come in," I say, hastily; "you're so wet; don't stand out there!" I step back into the warm, scented room, and he, after hanging back a minute, as if irresolute, follows me. We give each other no polite greeting; we stand by the crackling, cheery fire blaze, and say nothing for a while; only we look into each other's eyes, with passionate, desperate longing across the mighty chasm which yawns between us. At length Dick says groaningly, as if the words were wrenched from him —

"Oh, Nell! Nell! why did you do this! why did you jilt me when I loved you so?"

The blood rushed boiling, surging into my cheeks and forehead and throat. I was a mean-spirited woman;



till he said that, I had absolutely forgotten his ill-treatment of me.

"How dare you ask that?" I cried vehemently, "you, who have blighted all my life for me; you, who have been more cruel to me than ever man was to woman before; you, who never sent me word or sign, all through those weary six months; you, who had not even the bare civility to answer the letters I wrote to you in my misery!"

I stopped, suffocated.

"What — *do* — you mean!" said Dick, very slowly; he was spreading his broad hands to the blaze, and his drenched pilot coat was steaming in the warmth. At my upbraidings, no remorse, only intensest surprise came into his face. "I never had but one letter from you, and *that* one you most solemnly adjured me not to answer. Here it is! I have carried it about with me, night and day, ever since I got it."

He put his hand into his breast pocket, and pulled out a letter. I snatched it eagerly; it was like my handwriting, but it was not it; it was neater, carefuller, more ornate. I turned to the signature; there was none; then I read it through: —

"MY DEAREST, — It seems so odd and so pleasant, sitting down to write to you; but oh! I'm grieved to have to tell you that this first letter must also be the last; at least for ever so long. Don't be angry with me, but I told papa all about you; you know how I love him, and I could not bear to keep anything from him. Well! he was very *very* angry at first; would not hear of it at all; said it was all nonsense, and that we had both behaved shamefully; but at last, after a great



deal of trouble and begging, I got him to come round so far as to say, that if we both remained in the same mind for a year, he would then listen to us; only he stipulated that we must neither see nor write to each other during the year. I did my very best, as you may imagine, to make him change his decision, but all to no purpose! It seems a little hard, doesn't it? and I cannot help crying a little sometimes, when I think of neither hearing from, nor seeing you for so long. But, after all, a year will soon be gone, and just think how happy we shall be then. Good-by, my darling. God bless you!

“Ever your own.

“P.S. — I adjure and implore you not to answer this: *I beg it of you as a proof of your love.* Papa would be sure to see the letter, and then we should be in worse case than we are now even. Good-by again, my own darling.”

“I never wrote a word of it,” said I, compelling myself to speak very calmly, though I clutched hold of a chair-back for support. “Never! it's all a forgery; this is Dolly's doing!”

“What!” said he, gasping, and his strong frame staggered as under a mighty blow; “you never wrote this!”

“Never!” said I, very solemnly. “I wrote you plenty of other letters to tell you how much I loved you, and to ask you why you never wrote to me, as you promised to do?”

“And I never got one of them!” he said; and as



he spoke, the blood retreated from his lips, and left them livid.

We stared at one another blankly: we were as if stunned.

Presently he asked, hoarsely, "What made her do it?"

"Oh, I see it, I see it all!" I groaned, wringing my hands. "She was determined I should marry *him*" (I could not mention his hated name), "and I've done it; I have fallen into the trap she laid for me! Oh! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

I burst into loud sobbing, and throwing myself on the ottoman, buried my head in the cushions.

"She-devil!" said Dick, grinding his white teeth, like a wild beast in his rage and agony: "I wish to God I had her here now, I'd tear her limb from limb, though she is a woman; by G— I would!"

"If my heartiest, bitterest curse," said I, vindictively, "can do her any harm, she has the comfort of knowing that she has got it;" and then I flung myself on the floor, and wept afresh — wept till I was exhausted, and till my eyes had nearly disappeared from their situations.

He, meanwhile, stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece, watching me, with his angry, hopeless, passionate eyes; he did not attempt to give me any comfort; he could not give what he had not got, poor fellow! and besides was not I another man's wife! It was Sir Hugh's business to dry my tears, not his.

"And so it's all a mistake! all a mistake!" said he at last, very brokenly, as if to himself; and the gilt clock changed its tune, and went ticking on — "all a mistake, all a mistake!"



Then I rose from off the floor, and went and sat down on the ottoman again, and forgot Sir Hugh's existence altogether. The rainy wind still blustered and wailed and stormed outside; but yet the storm within our breasts was mightier.

"I cannot stand it any longer," said Dick, vehemently, clenching his hand, and bringing it down like a sledge-hammer on the marble slab. "I must go, or I shall make a beast of myself. Nell! I'm sailing for India to-morrow; say one kind word to me before I go. Oh, Nell! Nell! you belonged to me before you belonged to him, d— him!"

Looking into his haggard, beautiful, terrible face, I forgot all I should have remembered; forgot virtue, and honour, and self-respect; my heart spoke out to his. "Oh, don't go!" I cried, running to him, "don't you know how I love you? for *my* sake stay; I cannot live without you!"

I clasped both hands on his rough coat sleeve, and my bowed head sank down upon them.

"Do you suppose I can live in England and see you belonging to another man?" he asked, harshly; "the world is all hell now, as it is; but that would be the blackest, nethermost hell! No, let me go," said he, fiercely, pushing me away from him roughly, while his face was writhen and distorted.

"If you go," I said in my insanity, throwing myself into his arms, "I'll go too. Oh! for God's sake take me with you."

He strained me to his desolate heart, and we kissed each other wildly, vehemently: none came between us then. Then he tried to put me away from him.

"My darling," said he, "you don't know what



you're saying. Do you think I'm such a brute as to be the ruin of the only woman I ever loved?" and his deep voice was sorely shaken as he spoke.

But I would not be put away: I clung about his neck, in my bitter pain — my mad despair.

"Oh, don't leave me behind you! You're all I have in the world now. Oh, take me, take me with you!"

My hair fell in its splendid ruddy billows over his great shoulder, and my arms were flung about the state-ly pillar of his throat.

He set his teeth hard, and drew in his breath; it was a tough ordeal.

"I won't!" he said, hoarsely. "For God's sake stop tempting me! I'd sooner cut your throat than take you! Do you think it would be loving you to bring you down to a level with the scum of the earth? Oh, Nell! Nell! you ought to be my good angel. Don't tempt me to kill my own soul and yours!"

The reproachful anguish of his tones smote me like a two-edged sword. I said no more — I lay passive as a log in the arms that must so soon loose me for ever, while the madness died slowly, frostily out of me.

"I'm very wicked, I know," I whispered piteously; "you don't hate me, Dick, do you, for wanting to go with you?"

"Hate you! my poor pretty darling! If you could but look into my heart, and see what it is without you!"

Great tears are standing in his honest, tender, agonized eyes — tears which don't disgrace his manhood much, I think.



"Go now," I whisper, huskily: "I can bear it. God bless you, darling!"

"My little Nell! My own little snowdrop!" he cries, and then he kisses me heart-brokenly; and as he so kisses and clasps me, a great blackness comes over my eyes, and I swoon away in his arms.

When I come back to life — come back with trouble, and sighings, and pain, I find myself lying in my long heavy black draperies on the sofa; find the candles burning low, and the fire nearly out; find that he is gone, and that I am alone — alone for evermore!

## CHAPTER XXXV.

HUGH and his mamma returned next day; the red and brown leaves were whirling and dancing about, and the tree-arms were creaking and grinding. Standing listlessly by my boudoir window, about four o'clock, I see the family coach and the bays coming with slow majesty through the park.

Hugh in his brown great-coat driving; our parent uprighter than one of her own knitting needles, and her *femme de chambre* inside; the valet and the footman in the dickey. Here they all are! welcome, welcome home! I had spent the last night, lying all along upon the earth, as David did when he was interceding for the life of his little son. I was interceding for the sparing of no life; I was but interceding for the taking away of my own. The rough west wind kept dashing the ivy sprays against the window pane, and I lay with my face buried in the deep-piled carpet, while my darling went away from me through the night — went



away forlornly, in his soaked pilot coat, with his dripping golden hair, and his true desolate heart.

As for Dolly, I had made up my mind about her. She had sown, and she was about to reap; she had laboured, and she was about to enter upon the reward of her labours.

"No! *that* she shall not! so help me God!" I cry out in my rage and pain; and the dying fire gives one sleepy flicker of surprise at my vehemence. I would go to Hugh and would tell him all. I had been dishonest to him all along; I would be honest now; I had been sailing under false colours; *now* I would run up my own black pirate flag. I would go to him, and tell him all my little bitter story; I would hide no detail; gloss over none of my own vast wickedness. I would tell him how I had thrown myself into that other man's arms, and begged him with tears and prayers more earnest than ever mother sent up in behalf of her dying child, to take me away with him, to make me utterly vile and enormously happy. And I would also tell him — for to *this*, that other anecdote would be but the necessary preface — of my sister's ingenious and newly-discovered accomplishment of imitating her neighbour's handwriting; an accomplishment which would have twisted her graceful neck a hundred years ago.

Hugh would turn me out of doors of course. I was fully prepared for that; I should not think it the least severe of him. I could see the old woman sweeping away her stiff lavender satin from contact with me, and looking at me with her stern Puritan eyes, as the Pharisees long ago, under the blue Palestine sky, looked at the woman, to whom our dear Lord Christ said,



“Neither do I condemn thee!” I should be turned out of doors, and should have to go about begging my bread, in greenish rags and a whine.

There was almost a relief in the idea; it would be a fit expiation for my crime. Moreover, what hardships, what ignominy, what most painful, most lingering death would not I have embraced *laughing*, to have baulked Dolly of the pay for which she had so diligently served her master, the Devil. Cowardly, chicken-hearted woman as I was — and there were few more so between the three seas, — terrifiedly as I had always shrunk from physical pain; in that first frenzy of agonized hate I would have hung all day beneath an Eastern sky, nailed hand and foot to a cross, while soul and body parted slowly — slowly — in unimagined anguish, would have been sawn asunder, stoned, burnt, readily, yea, most joyfully, if thereby I could have purchased for myself the power to be fitly revenged on her who had turned the jocund garden of my young life into a desolate wilderness!

“I will tell him to-day — to-morrow,” I say to myself, as I stand drumming with my fingers on the sill, and watching my own fine carriage, the carriage for which I have paid the longest price ever carriage fetched, sweeping dignifiedly up to my own Hall door. Hugh helps his mother out dutifully — “my boy” is a good son — and then I hear him coming running upstairs three steps at a time.

“Well, old girl, how are you? Why did not you come down to meet us? I was looking out for you at the Hall door.”

“I — I — don’t know, I’m sure,” I say, feeling horribly guilty, “I never thought of it.”



"Very glad to get home again," says Hugh, pulling off his dogskin gloves and precipitating himself into a minute cane arm-chair; for, if you remark, men always select the smallest chair they can find to deposit their persons upon. "I wish my neighbours all the good in the world, but I don't seem to care how little I see of them now-a-days."

"Don't you?" with a feeble smile.

"Next time anyone invites me to his house, I think I shall say 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come,' eh, Nell?" (I have turned a wife out of doors, and therefore I cannot come, will be a more valid excuse, I think bitterly.) "I say, Nell, what do you say to running downstairs, and saying something civil to the old lady; I suppose it would be a proper attention, wouldn't it? and old people are such sticklers for their dignity."

"Oh, yes — oh, to be sure — I was forgetting;" I cry, and I turn to go and greet my "mother," while Hugh follows me.

We find the old dowager sitting in the library: she has not yet laid aside her toga, and is reading her letters.

"I hope you have had a pleasant visit," I say, rather timidly.

"Charming, my dear, charming!" (rustling her letter, and giving me a fond but prickly kiss. It is a dreadful thing living in the house with two moustaches nearly related to you, I find). My version of the little touching hymn to our mammas, that we all commit to memory in early life would be:

"Who ran to help me when I fell,  
And kissed the place and *stabbed* it well,  
My mother."



"They always arrange their parties so nicely, no mixtures; one never runs any risk there of having any of these *nouveaux riches* forced willy nilly upon one; the dear Bishop, and Lord and Lady Brandreth — oh, by-the-by, Lady Brandreth asked a great deal about you, was so sorry to miss the opportunity of making your acquaintance; we must positively return her call next week, my dear."

"Yes, certainly, if you wish." (By next week, I shall have assumed the greenish rags and the whine.)

I did not tell Hugh on that day, nor on the day after, nor on the day after that. Do not we all know how, without having faltered in our resolution to do a disagreeable thing, we keep putting it off, from one day to another. And meanwhile, the said excellent Hugh pursued the even tenor of his way, doing his duty to God and to man, according to his own ideas of what those duties were. Went to church and read "Bell's Life" on Sundays; hunted, and drained, and liquid-manured, and steam-ploughed on week days.

As for the little tiffs in his seraglio — for little tiffs there were even in those early days, little tiffs there must always be, when an old woman and a young one hold divided sway — as long as they were not obtruded on his notice, he treated them with the sublime indifference with which Zeus, the cloud compeller, resting on the topmost peak of Olympus, or going to have a snug dinner with the Ethiopians, might have treated a squabble between those two arrant shrews, cow-eyed Hera, and gray-eyed Athene.

If my eyes were red, why it was the east wind, or a touch of influenza. If I did not talk, why he concluded philosophically that I had nothing to say, or



at least nothing to say on the subject that he was wont to delight in. For be it known that Sir Hugh was in the habit of keeping a hobby horse, saddled and bridled in his mind's stable; and on this docile animal he frequently cantered up and down, and took healthful exercise. As often as not, this hobby horse was some pet grievance, which went to sleep and underwent decent burial, as long as the hunting and draining and liquid-manuring were in full force, but was resurrectionized whenever they were found insufficient to employ all the powers of his intellect.

At present the grievance was a projected railway, that was to intersect a part of his property. It was to run only for about a mile and a half through one or two out-lying farms, and it was of no earthly disadvantage to him or his, and he knew it; and yet to hear him talk, you would have imagined that it involved the ruin of the whole Lancastria Gens.

"It is too bad!" he is saying now, in a quasi-injured voice, as he sits cracking walnuts at his comfortable dinner-table; "one cannot call a foot of one's property one's own now-a-days; one can never be safe from having one's land cut up by these rascally projectors, for their beastly lines that nobody wants."

"Disgraceful!" echoes the acquiescent Dowager, who like lovely Thais, sits beside him, with her head unlike lovely Thais, I imagine, crowned with one of those weird erections of black velvet and steel that old women delight in. "I suppose it is all these dreadful Radicals. I'm sure I don't know what the country is coming to; I suppose they will bring their horrid railways through one's drawing-room next."

"It's such a confounded swindle!" pursues Hugh,



applying the nutcrackers viciously to a walnut as if it had been a director's head; "the merest bubble! only people are such fools; they will be taken in, try as one may to open their eyes; and if they do get it — and they won't get it so easy as they think, *I* can tell them — it will never pay them sixpence in the pound."

"Won't it, dear?" say I, starting into sudden interest, for I imagined that my husband addressed his last remark more particularly to me; but I am mistaken; it is only that having finished his walnuts, his eyes are gazing straight before him, and consequently, unavoidably take me in in their range of vision.

"Don't you remember, mother," he goes on, after a few minutes devoted to sipping claret, bringing his eyes to bear on his mamma, and thereby putting his wife off guard; "don't you remember, they were talking about this line once before, five years or so ago. There was some sense in it then, because the Tadcaster and Milton branch was not open then; but when that was opened it did away with all need for this — for that — I mean, don't you see?"

He ends, for he perceives that the relative pronouns are getting too many for him.

"These horrid companies get everything their own way now-a-days! I declare it is quite shocking! it seems to me that no one can do anything for themselves in these days, but must have a company to help them. We shall be having praying companies, and going to bed companies soon."

Our prophetic parent ceases and adjusts her diadem,



the point of which is veering gently round towards her left ear.

"Lord —— made such a capital speech in the house yesterday, upon these infernal railways; shows 'em up so completely, brings 'em down to chapter and verse, don't you know. *I don't care what any one says,*" pursues Sir Hugh, looking round on his harem with a determined air, "but I stick to it, that he is the best speaker they've got now; out and out, *out and out*, I say."

"Ah!" says the senior occupant of the seraglio, deferentially, "won't you read it to us, dear Hugh? at least any part of it that you think we could understand; we should like it so much, should not we, Nelly?"

I again start and blush; I always am starting and blushing of late, and say very nervously, "Oh, yes, to be sure, dear — so much — oh do!"

So we migrate to the drawing-room, and Ariel, *alias* Tomkins, having fetched to-day's "Times," dear Hugh begins to read through two and a half columns of statements and statistics, and representations, all gilded by the lambent glow of Lord ——'s wit. Meanwhile "mamma" having assisted her spectacles to mount her long nose, draws her parish bag towards her, and begins to clothe the naked, "hear, hear's" and "cheers," and asks the reader is he sure he is not tired, begs him not to make himself hoarse, and offers to get black currant lozenges for him.

I work too, and do my best to keep my attention somewhere within a mile of those big sheets; to laugh and express surprise and horror at the right places; not to laugh where I ought to express horror, not to



express horror where I ought to laugh; and by dint of care and always taking my cue from the dowager, I succeed admirably. I could not sleep that night for the wind; it kept roaring so, and groaning in the great Scotch fir close to my bed-room windows. It shook the window frames, and came banging with impotent fury against the stout stone walls.

*That* was a stormy time; many and many a coast was strewn with wrecks and stranded vessels.

"What an awful night!" my mother-in-law had said, as we came up the deep carpeted stairs to bed. "How thankful we ought to be, my dear, that we have no one dear to us at sea."

(Oh yes, so thankful, of course). What did it matter to us that the "Euryalus" sailed from Cork for India four days ago, with the —th Dragoons on board. God help that poor ship to-night, labouring through a wintry sea, with the great greenish gray waves, with their angry white crests towering high above her mast-heads! God help the one passenger that for me that ship contains! The man in the drenched pilot coat, with the set white face, that day and night I see so plainly, that I shall see when the damps and dews of death are coming dankly down upon my own.

The wind lulls every now and then for a minute or two, to gather fresh strength for the onset; then comes tearing, howling, shrieking like a hundred lost spirits over the wintry wolds. Oh God! he'll be drowned! he'll be drowned! perhaps he is drowned already! perhaps the crabs and scrawls, and noisome, shapeless sea beasts are already gnawing at the heart that beat with such passionate agony against mine a week ago.



Towards morning the hurricane moderates, and I fall asleep heavily, and dream confusedly of churchyards, and of my father as alive again, while yet I know somehow all the while that he is dead — of tombs and drowned men. I sleep on late, and my eyelids are purple, and my eyes look as if they had been put in with a dirty finger, when I go down late — a great crime at Wentworth — to breakfast.

"I hope you have not waited! I'm so sorry!" I say apologetically, as I make my tardy entrance.

"I think, my dear, that it would be as well if you could try and be down for family prayers," says Lady Lancaster, stiffly; "it is a bad example for the servants when the mistress is absent, and it is no great hardship to be dressed by nine o'clock; at least, it used not to be considered so in my young days."

"Come, come, mother, we must not be too hard upon her," says Hugh, taking my hand fondly; "she is not so tough as we old stagers are; and the wind kept her awake, poor little woman! she is half asleep still, isn't she?"

To prevent any wrangling over my unprayerful spirit, I betake myself to my letters, which are lying in a little heap beside my plate. My correspondence is not of much interest generally. The first that I take up has a very broad black edge, ostentatiously broad, like the Pharisees' phylacteries. I look at the hand-writing, frown, tear it open, and read. It does not take long reading.

"My dear Nelly, — As you and *dear* Hugh, to whom I can *never* be sufficiently grateful, have been so kind as to offer me a home, I write to ask if you



will allow me to take shelter there early next week. I trust that my coming will be no annoyance to dear Lady Lancaster, but indeed I shall try hard to be in nobody's way.

"Your affectionate sister,  
"DOROTHEA LESTRANGE."

The evil day has come then; the match must be put to the train of gunpowder, which is to blow the reputation of the Lestranges, and the domestic peace and honour of the Lancasters into the air. Shortly after breakfast I go and knock, with trembling knuckles, at the door of Hugh's snugery, where he and his bailiff hold their Witenagemotes, and transact the affairs of the Wentworth nation.

"May I come in, Hugh?"

"Come in! of course you may!"

I enter.

"What do you mean by knocking, Nell? have you orgotten that uncommon cold day, not so long ago, when I endowed you with all my worldly goods? I did not make any exception in favour of this sanctum, did I?"

"I wanted to speak to you," I say, coming over to the table, with my eyes glued to the carpet.

"All right! fire away! only come a bit closer to the fire, and don't stand there looking like a little undertaker's assistant."

"I have heard from Dolly!"

"Oh! we shall have to have your tongue slit like a magpie's, Nell, to make you talk a bit faster; she's coming, I suppose."

"She wants to come next week."



“Poor Dolly! I’m sure I shall be very glad to see her: and I suppose you have come to talk about what rooms she is to have, and that sort of thing; but you had better settle all that with the old lady; she’ll be fit to be tied, if she is not taken into council.”

I make a great plunge; it is like taking a header into a cold tub on a frosty morning.

“Hugh” (twisting a rosary of jet beads that I have about my neck, round my fingers) — “would you mind my telling her not to come?”

Hugh opens his brown eyes very wide, wider than ever Providence intended those windows to his worthy soul to be thrown open.

“Tell her not to come! after having offered her a home, to slink out of it; leave her, poor girl, without a roof to shelter her pretty head in! why, Nell, you must be joking!”

“Joking!” I cry, passionately; “if you knew all, you would not think it a joking matter. I cannot *breathe* in the same house with her!”

Hugh comes over, and pulls me down on the sofa beside him. “You must have a slate off this morning, Nell! wind blew it off last night! Ha! Ha! cannot breathe in the same house with your only sister! such a big house too; you *must* require a deal of fresh air! you have been squabbling by post, I suppose!”

“It’s no case of squabbling!” I say, very earnestly, while I feel my white cheeks getting crimson; “oh, Hugh, I have something to tell you — something I *must* tell you — oh, I wish it was not so hard!”

“If it is anything about Dolly — anything she



has done wrong, or any scrape she has got into — I don't seem to care about hearing about it!" says Hugh, "I dare say she'd sooner I didn't, you know, and there is no use crying over spilt milk."

"It's about myself, too!" I say, in great agitation.

Hugh puts his kind arm round me, and looks with incredulous amused eyes at my half-averted face. "Some dreadful crime you have been committing, eh? not said 'Amen' loud enough in church, or pitched into Bentham for giving your back-hair a tug?"

His utter unsuspectingness stabs me.

"Oh, don't, don't laugh!" I cry, piteously; "you wouldn't, if you knew."

There is nothing on earth that Hugh hates so much as a scene, and he fears that one is imminent. "I've got something to tell you too," he says, cheerily, rising and walking towards his *escritoire*; "and as mine seems to be the pleasantest piece of news, I'll have it out first; *yours* will keep, I'm sure!"

I remain sitting on the sofa where he left me, twisting my hands about, and wishing — oh, how heartily! — that this confession, of the gravity of which my husband is so utterly unsuspecting, were well over, and I turned out of doors once for all. Presently, he comes back with a small red leather case in his hand, and sits down again beside me.

"Do you remember, Nell," he says, composing his jolly face to a decent gravity, befitting, as he thinks, the subject — "do you remember telling me once that you had nothing but a photograph of — of — your poor father?"



"Yes," I say wincing; "don't talk about him!" (Nobody ever mentions his name to me now; I cannot bear it.)

"I won't, I won't!" says Hugh, apologetically; not more than I can help, at least; but I have had this done for you, and I want you to take one look at it, if you don't mind."

He unfastens the case, takes out a large gold locket, with the monogram A. L. in diamonds upon it, and after fumbling a little about the spring, opens it with his big, kind, clumsy fingers.

I look half reluctant, and in an instant the tears come rushing to my eyes. I see again the kind blue eyes, the humorous, tender smile that the coffin-lid hid away from me six dreary weeks ago; it is my old man come to life again, only that the artist has painted out half the weary care lines; my old man, as he was before his troubles came upon him; as he will be — oh, no! he will look yet nobler and more beautiful and more peaceful then — when he comes to meet me at the golden gates.

I throw my arms round Hugh's neck; it is the first time that I ever kissed him voluntarily in my life. Poor Hugh! my emotion is hardly of the pleasurable kind that he had hoped and intended. He looks uneasily concerned, and I see his mouth forming itself into his favourite whistling shape.

"I did not mean to upset you like this, Nell!" he says, by-and-by.

"Oh, you are so good to me!" I cry, incoherently; "and I'm not at all good to you! Oh, I do so wish that I liked you better! I do so wish that I had always liked you!"



Hugh pats my hair very fondly.

"My dear old woman!" he says, "let bygones be bygones! don't let us rake up any old grievances; it don't make much odds if you hated me like poison once, so as you don't hate me now!"

We sit silent for a few minutes. Hugh whistles "Polly Perkins" very softly to himself, while doubt and vacillation enter my mind.

My husband's words keep ringing in my ears. "Let bygones be bygones!" Is he right? Would not it be better to "let the dead past bury its dead?" Have I not done him enough injury already, coming to him so meanly, taking all his love and his kind words and caresses, and giving him nothing in return but sour looks and peevish tears and dimmed beauty; without lacerating that honest heart unnecessarily, by telling him that his wife is unfaithful to him; if not in deed, at least in heart and thought.

The temptation is gone, never to return; why not let that secret remain between God and my own heart? But if I abandon my confession, I must also abandon my revenge; the one involves the other.

"I often think," says Hugh, with more gravity than is his wont, "that one great cause of there being so much unhappiness in married life is people's expecting too much of one another; I don't want us to split on that rock, Nell. I should like you to look a bit happier certainly by-and-by; and to seem a bit more glad to see me, when I come to speak to you, if you can; but if not, why we must rub on as we are, and I'm very thankful to Providence for having given you to me at all!"



"Providence made you but a shabby present!" I say with contrition.

"Not much to brag of, I daresay;" says Hugh playfully, pulling my ear, "but you see I am easily pleased. Well, I must be going out; I cannot stop molly-coddling away half a morning at a foolish little woman's apron strings; and I say, Nell, you go and talk to the old lady about Dolly, and drop the poor girl a line to tell her we shall be very glad to see her any day she likes to come; and don't let me hear any more nonsense about envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness!"

"But I *do* hate her! I have every reason to hate her! Hugh! Hugh!" I call after him, eagerly, but he has beaten a hasty retreat, to avoid further discussion of the subject.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

"VENGEANCE is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord!" Of all the texts of Scripture, that is the one that kept saying itself over and over again to my heart, as I sat that morning listening in respectful silence, while Lady Lancaster went on purring about Lady Brandreth's crochet needles, and the fleecy wool she had to send to Glasgow for — could not get it in England, my dear, tried every shop in Regent Street.

Do you know that after all my blustering and threats and big resolutions, I am beginning to think that I must leave that said vengeance in the hands of Him to whom it appertains; that I must not meddle with the attributes of the Omnipotent. I have cooled



down from my first fever of indignant hate. I am not the stuff of which Jaels are made. My fingers would have trembled so that I could never have hammered the nail into my prostrate enemy's tired brows. I should have fallen to pitying him; lying there so weary, so helpless, so trustful. I am beginning to doubt whether I will bring the last of the old name — name for ever hallowed by my father's having worn it, — to disgrace and shame, whether, despite all her misdoings, I will turn her out adrift and homeless on the world.

I am beginning to see my own sins very clearly, and not other people's only. Will not Dolly's tormenting presence in my house, the sound of her silky voice, the sight of her subtle beauty triumphing over the ruins of my life, be a fit penance for my own wickedness? Can any expiation be too hard, too bitter, for the woman who fell so low as to ask another man to run away with her from her husband? who was only saved from utter shipwreck by the untainted nobility of soul, the selfless devotion and honour of her lover himself.

"Your sister Dorothea had a charming *crochet tricoter* pattern, when last she was here, my dear; she seemed a beautiful worker, quite different from you, Nell. By-the-by, I am afraid that the hunting season will be over before poor dear Hugh's waistcoat is finished; she will be a great assistance to me, I fancy, when she comes to us next week. Did she say what day we were to expect her, my dear?"

"No."

"Have you written to her, my love? because if not, had not you better go and do so immediately?"



"There's plenty of time," I say indolently; "it is not near post hour."

"There is never any use in procrastination, my dear, as my dear mother used often to say to me, when I was your age, and besides, I shall want you to come and pay a few calls with me this afternoon. You really must try and exert yourself a little more than you do, Nell. There is something almost lethargic about you at times."

So I retire and write a little icy note to my sister; telling her that my husband bids me say she is welcome to come any day she chooses, and that I am her's sincerely, Eleanor Lancaster.

The day of Dolly's advent comes, and the carriage is sent to the station for her. Hugh had suggested to me, to go to meet her in it; an honour which I steadfastly persist in declining. Lady Lancaster is writing letters in her own room, almost effacing with her long old nose the characters which she forms with her fingers. I am buried in an arm-chair in my boudoir, reading a novel. It interests me rather, for it is all about a married woman, who ran away from her husband and suffered the extremity of human ills in consequence. I have made several steps in morality of late, I flatter myself, but even now, I can hardly imagine that I should have been very miserable if Dick had taken me away with him.

The naughty matron is just dying of a broken heart and starvation in a Penitentiary, when I hear carriage wheels. Postponing the last dying speech and confession of the faded flower, I jump up, run to the window, and peep behind the blinds. I am in time to see Dolly descend gracefully — my sister can get in



and out of a carriage with any woman in England, not so easy an accomplishment as one might think — and hold out two little black hands effusively to Hugh.

Dolly gives one an impression of extreme blackness altogether. "Poor dear Papa" is written all over her, in best paramatta and deepest crape. Even the slender shapely legs that I caught a glimpse of a minute ago on the carriage step, look as if they belonged unmistakably to a mourner.

"Nell! Nell!" shouts my domestic Stentor, but I respond not. Then I hear my husband's and sister's voices approaching me.

"She's not here, I'm sure," Hugh is saying, "or she would have answered when I called; she always does; she's out, I'm afraid." He opens the boudoir door. "She is here after all; why, old woman, what has become of your manners? come and say how do you do to Dolly?"

Dolly is advancing rapidly to precipitate herself on my neck, but something in my face keeps her back, and alters her intention.

"How do you do?" I say very coldly, not even holding out my hand to her.

Hugh looks from one to the other, puzzled and uncomfortable.

"Well, I suppose you two have got a hundred and one things to say to one another, and would only be wishing me at the other end of nowhere if I were to stop, so I'll make myself scarce," he says, cheerfully, and then he goes out, and shuts the door behind him.

We stand opposite each other like two fighting cocks for a minute or so; then Dolly sinks into a chair.



"As you don't appear to intend to invite me to take a seat, I suppose I must invite myself," she says, smiling; "you certainly have the *manière prévenante*, Nell, which is becoming so rapidly extinct."

"I have; have I?"

"You know how to welcome the coming, and I should imagine also how to speed the parting guest."

"I do, do I?"

The delicate carnation is deepening in my sister's cheeks; those cheeks that look smoother and clearer than ever in their crape setting.

"I hardly know how to break the news to you, but I'm afraid I shall not be able to trespass on your hospitality long."

"Hm! are you going to betake yourself to a better world?" I ask ironically; "you certainly are too good for this."

"I'm going to make a home for myself!" says my sister, with calm triumph; "I am going to marry Lord Stockport."

I stand for a moment dumb-founded, aghast. Where, where is my story-book code of morality? Where is the whipping for the naughty boy? Here is a young woman who has told lies, has forged, has wrecked the happiness of her sister's whole life, and she is punished; how? — why by marrying a lord with £80,000 a year. Truly, poetic justice is confined to poetry indeed; and comes down never to the prose dealings of every-day life.

"Lord Stockport!" I ejaculate, "happy man!"

An angry scintillation flashes from Dolly's superb black eyes.

"He is to be pitied, isn't he, poor man? his wife



cannot bring him the ample stock of affection and fidelity that Sir Hugh Lancaster's did him! Of course not! that goes without saying."

"She can bring him a large stock of accomplishments, though!" I say, quickly, breathing short and hard.

Miss Lestrangle looks as if she did not exactly see the drift of this observation; she says "*Après?*" interrogatively

"Lady Stockport's list of talents will be longer than Desdemona's even;" I say, very bitterly. "So delicate with her needle! an admirable musician! — oh, she would sing the savageness out of a bear — of so high and plenteous a wit and invention — *and can imitate her neighbour's handwriting so excellently.*"

Dolly gives a start, a perceptible start, but recovers herself immediately.

"What do you mean?" she asks, quietly; "you ought to be published with a key or a commentary!" but I see her fingers tightening their hold upon the back of her chair.

I go over to my writing-table, and take out a letter. "This is what I mean!" I say, very slowly, holding it up before her; "I am sure Lord Stockport will prize the gift of your hand all the more, when he sees how clever it is! I intend to keep this to show him!"

The carmine retires rather rapidly from my sister's cheeks, and from her full lips also, as she scans the document.

"Are you quite so sure that you will be Lady Stockport now?" I ask, very softly.

We are silent a minute; then Dolly says, very sharply — none of the old sweetness in her tone,



"How did you get this? you must have been seeing that man again?"

It is not a bad idea, carrying the war into the enemy's quarters, is it?

"It is not much matter to you how I got it; it is enough for you to know that I have got it."

"Of course! of course! only it is a pity that any detail should be wanting to complete such a pretty story."

"It will be quite complete enough for Lord Stockport, I dare say!" I say, very drily.

"And for Hugh?" asks Dolly, with a little vicious smile.

"We will be impartial!" I say, coldly; "they shall both hear it."

Dolly laughs softly, and the colour comes back with a deeper, fuller rush to her face. "Resurrection of Daddy Long-legs! a tragedy in two acts," she says, derisively.

If I have expected to overwhelm my sister with the damning proofs of her guilt, I am disappointed. As the petrel is popularly supposed to rejoice in the storm, so Dolly appears almost to riot in the war of the moral elements; "to be put on the boards of the Wentworth theatre, what day, Nell? let us be exact!"

"To-day!" I cry, raising my voice, my hard kept composure giving way, and merging into honest passionate anger, "there is never any use in delaying the exposure of crime."

"Impossible, my dear," says my sister, with a shrug, "one of the principal actors will be absent. Stockport does not come till Saturday!"

"Poor man!" I say compassionately, "it will be a



pleasant surprise for him discovering that his wife is a *forger*." Dolly subsides into gravity.

"I never objected to people calling a spade a spade; I suppose I am a forger; but to my thinking, the end justifies the means, and has done so in this case; there is one commandment I am sorry for having broken, and only one!"

"Which?"

"The eleventh, peculiarly appropriated to woman's use. 'Thou shalt not be found out!'" replies Dolly with composure.

"Unfortunately you *have* broken it!" I say, struggling to emulate her calmness, "and now you must pay the penalty!"

"Don't let us have any threatening, it is not lady-like; let us be lady-like whatever we are!" says Dolly, standing up, and sweeping gracefully over towards the door. "Have me up for forgery, if you like — 'Scandal in high life;' it would make the fortune of the Nantford Advertiser; drag the old name through the dirt; it will annoy you far more than it will me, to tell you the truth. I have never been *very* much in love with either Stockport or respectability, so that the loss of neither will *quite* break my heart."

A knock at the door.

"May I come in?" in an old croaky voice, and without waiting for permission, a long reddish nose, a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and a beard make their appearance.

We both look rather foolish, like little naughty boys whose pockets have been found bulging with the illicit marble, or the succulent bull's-eye in church. Simultaneously, we vault off our high horses.



"I am afraid I'm interrupting a pleasant *tête-à-tête*!" says the old lady, pokerishly, "but I heard your voice, my dear Dorothea, and I thought I must come in and just say how d'ye do to you. Are not you very tired after your journey, my dear child? those cross lines are so fatiguing; so many changes, and having to look after your own luggage too. I suppose it is an old-fashioned notion on my part, but I never can reconcile myself to the idea of young people travelling alone. So many unpleasant *contretemps* have occurred of late, too; no communication between the carriages, and since that dreadful affair of Mr. Briggs too?"

"You did not interrupt us at all, dear Lady Lancaster," says Dolly, whom the old woman's babble has given time to recover her *aplomb*; "we had nearly finished our chat, hadn't we, Nell?"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

It is the twentieth day of February, in the year of our Lord 186 —. The violets, like Noah's dove, are poking their noses out of doors, to see what sort of weather it is. They are beginning to quit their wintry lodgment,

"Where they together  
All the hard weather  
Dead to the world, keep house unknown."

White ones, plenty of them, are peeping out modestly, from among freshest green leaves, on the sunny south side of Lestrange churchyard, above the prone heads of the human flowers, to whom the spring time of Resurrection is long in coming. Sir Adrian Lestrange



loved them so dearly; every spring he used to come with his little daughter Nell to look for them, and smile his friendly welcome to them and the celandines that carpet goldenly the space beneath the old black-budded ashes.

Sir Adrian does not come this spring: he is "away," good man! He has travelled to a land where there are better flowers than his pretty violets, and where he and his little Nell can walk about together in peace, without any "cloaked shadow" coming between to part them, as they have been parted for just a little space — a little bitter minute — here below!

The celandines are spreading their gaudy carpet also beneath the elms and sycamores in Sir Hugh Lancaster's garden at Wentworth. They are flaring and flaunting away with such confident pertness; just for all the world as if they were real garden flowers, and did not deserve to be extirpated every bit as much as the poor daisies which were always being ruthlessly spudded up.

The first breath of spring is blowing about the land; she is raising herself a little out of winter's snowy lap, waking up and rubbing her fair eyes. I have been late for prayers again, and have received a mild jobation in consequence.

Breakfast is over now, and Lady Lancaster and I are standing at the Hall door, watching our Hugh mount his hack to ride to a rather distant meet. Hugh looks his best a-cock horse; one does not see how short he is, and he has the best seat in ——shire.

"How well Hugh looks on horseback!" exclaims the Dowager, never weary of admiring her son, though the spectacle is anything but a novel one to her.



"He does not look amiss in pink," I respond, less rapturously, but still with commendation in my tone; for to give myself my due, I am growing to love Hugh with all love

"Except the love  
Of man and woman, when they love their best  
Closest and sweetest."

The last vestige of my lord's red coat having disappeared round a bend in the drive, I turn away and stroll up and down the terrace by myself. The sun is getting a little power: he beats quite warmly on my uncovered head, and I saunter and potter about slowly, and watch the crocuses, yellow, and purple, and striped, forcing their way up through the rich red earth. A small fat cock robin is sitting on the stone balustrades, singing his little heart out. I stand pensively listening to him.

"I wish I were as happy as you!" I say to myself; "I do indeed! it would be so pleasant!"

There is a little sound of pebbles being swept along, and looking up I see Dolly coming along to meet me. Dolly in a tight-fitting black dress, which shows every curve and turn of her exquisite figure, and relieved about neck and wrists by the nattiest of white linen collar and cuffs. It is not every one that can blend the afflictive and the becoming as our Dolly can. Dolly looks lovelier in the early morning, in her every-day gown, than when dressed, or undressed — as the *mode* now has it — for ball or opera.

"Delicious morning, isn't it?" says my sister, stopping beside me, and sniffing the sweet fresh air, with her little Greek nose.

"Yes."



"What a pretty place it is!" surveying admiringly the wide formal gardens, where terraces, gravel walks, Deodaras, urns, recur with almost as tedious a monotony as the knops and flowers in the Tabernacle decorations.

"Not particularly, I don't think!"

"If people only knew what was for their own good!" with a gentle sigh: "you ought to be a very happy woman, Nell!"

"You have done your best to make me so, at all events!"

"I did evil that good might come, as I told you yesterday, when that exemplary old tabby interrupted us (by-the-by I hope she has not been eaves-dropping), and good *has* come," says Dolly steadily; "*àpropos* of that, I have something to tell you; Stockport comes to-day."

"Well?"

"Oh nothing particular, of course; only I thought I had better tell you, so that you might have your weapon ready to stab the poor soul with, as soon as he arrives."

Dolly is not agitated — she never is; "wise men never wonder;" and "with the wisdom of the children of this world" none can deny that Dorothea is dowered. Perhaps it is my fancy that there is rather an anxious light in the great dreamy sensuous eyes, that the flush on the oval cheeks is deeper than what the soft south wind has brought there.

"Thanks," I say, very coldly; and then I go and lean my arms on the balustrade (our talking has scared away the robin), and look wistfully off over the landscape, winking in the morning sun, to the East,



whither my heart has gone. One would have thought, wouldn't one, that Dolly having told her errand, would straightway have returned again whence she came, but such does not seem to be her intention. She comes, on the contrary, and leans on the rough cold stone beside me.

"Let us understand one another, Nell," she says, with some slight hesitation; "are you *really* bent on exhibiting that unlucky document, or is it only a *bogy* that you are keeping to frighten me into good behaviour with?"

"I thought we had understood each other perfectly the other night, and that there was no need for fresh explanations," I say, icily; "I imagined that I had made my meaning tolerably clear then."

"And about yourself?" she says quickly; "have you considered what awkward inquiries it will entail, inquiries too from a person who has the best right in the world to make them, and who cannot be put off, as you have put off me, with 'it is enough for you that I *have* got it.' Hugh must be more or less than human if he is not a little curious to know how you came by it. Lords with £80,000 a year don't grow on every hedge; it is worth while eating a little dirt for one of them, isn't it?"

I turn round and face her.

"Do you think," I say eagerly, "that if it entailed the loss of my life, I should very much care?—thanks to you, I may say, with Agag, 'surely the bitterness of death is past.'"

Dolly looks down and draws geometrical patterns with her slender pointed foot.

"I know you won't believe me, so it's rather wast-



ing breath asseverating," she says slowly, "but I give you my word of honour I did it for the best; I thought that it was a childish besotment you had for that man; a sort of calf love, that it would be a real kindness to help you out of."

"Without an *arrière pensée* for your own advantage, of course. It would have been truer kindness to have cut my throat for my own good!" I end passionately. My voice shakes and wavers in my intense self pity; I am afraid of breaking down into weeping before her, into "howling," "blubbering," "snivelling," as she in her dry-eyed contemptuousness would graphically phrase it; so I rush away, away to the house, and up to my chamber, like Joseph, to weep there. For an hour or more I sit with my two hands holding my head, buried in thought. Woe is me if my mamma-in-law catches me: small opinion has she of thought as an employment for the female sex, and then I rise, unlock the drawer of my writing-table, take out the "unlucky document," as its parent leniently calls it, and go down-stairs with it.

I find Dolly sitting by the library fire, her small white left hand on which Lord Stockport's great diamond betrothal ring is flashing and sparkling in the firelight (bitter, bitter will be the parting between Dolly and that jewel of price), is pushed in amongst the black wealth of her scented hair. She is staring with her great dark velvet eyes at the shining bars; her cheeks and small round ears are getting burnt a dull red, but she does not seem to heed that. I go up close to her, and stoop over her.

"Dolly!" I say with solemnity, "I have thought a great deal about my revenge upon you. I have lain



awake at night planning it; it has seemed meat and drink to me for the last week. I have finished planning it out now, look!"

As I speak I toss the letter into the fire's innermost heart, and watch the flames catch hold of it, and then shoot up high; watch it turn brown; then writhe like a thing in pain; then shrivel away utterly. Dolly jumps up and throws her arms about my neck.

"Don't," I say, gently disengaging myself; "keep your blandishments for the lover you have *saved*; I think he would appreciate them more."

So you see I gave up my revenge; I did not carry the stone in my pocket for seven years; then turn it, and carry it for seven years more. I yielded up my injuries unto Him, who claims the redressing of all the injustices that have been wrought since the world was. I had been clamouring for justice, bare justice. Alas! if bare justice is all I myself get, in that day when the world's long tangled accounts are made up, where shall I be?

"What shall I, frail man, be pleading?  
Who for me be interceding  
When the Just is Mercy needing?"

"A very worthy young man, my dear, I don't doubt," says Lady Lancaster to me, a morning or two afterwards, *àpropos* of my brother-in-law elect, as we sit pecketting at our work in the morning room — Hugh's waistcoat is making rapid strides towards completion — looking at me over the top of her spectacles, "very worthy, indeed! does not seem to have very much to say for himself, perhaps, but that is a fault on the right side in these days, when all young people



seem to think that they cannot have too much of the sound of their own voices!"

"He is rather silent!" I say, which is certainly putting it in a very mild form, seeing that I could count with ease on the fingers of one hand the remarks he has made since he entered our hospitable portals.

"Dear me!" pursues the old lady, wandering off into reminiscences, "how well I remember his grandfather's shop, to be sure! He was a hosier, you know, my dear, in Bond Street, a very civil old man with a bald head, I recollect — this young man has a look of him now and then — he used to come out to one's carriage door to take orders, and that sort of thing, my dear!"

"It is a very up-py and down-y world!" I say, sententiously.

"If he had told me then," continues my companion, making her speech more emphatic by uplifted and out-spread right hand, "that forty years from that time, my son and his grandson would be marrying two sisters, I should have withdrawn my custom from his shop for his impertinence."

I laugh.

"It is a rise, whose suddenness is only paralleled by Dick Whittington's and his cat; in fact, it beats them, for Dick was only Lord Mayor after all, and Stockport is Lord, without the Mayor!"

Meanwhile, the "worthy young man" and Dolly are strolling up and down the terrace. Dolly seems to like to keep within view of the windows. I fancy that the young Viscount's amenities become ponderous when freed from the restraint of the public eye.



So Dolly is to be wed; she is to be made a Viscountess of; to be elevated to a throne among the Gods. King Cophetua has given his hand to the Beggar Maid, and she is tripping daintily up to seat herself beside that august and condescending monarch.

But when is it to be? When are the festive poles to be run up, and the "healths to the houses of Stockport and Lestrange" to float in the breeze?

At first, Dolly stoutly maintained that no earthly power should induce her to allow her marriage to be celebrated till a full year had elapsed since "poor dear Papa's" death.

"O, impossible! quite out of the question! so disrespectful to his memory! Did he suppose she had no natural affection? &c. &c. When first the subject was hinted, she retreated from the room with her handkerchief to her eyes; not angry, but so *hurt*."

This I hear from Hugh.

"Completely upset, poor girl!" he says, pulling his thick moustache, and staring at his boots, which are stuck out straight before him; "so Stockport tells me. He thought he had put his foot into it with a vengeance, and that she was not going to speak to him again for a month of Sundays."

The text about polishing the sepulchres of the righteous occurs to me, but I keep it to myself.

"If ever I have any daughters," says Hugh — I look down — "I hope they'll be as fond of me as you two were of *him*."

(You *two*! classing us together! Good Heavens! that is hard to bear!)

"I'm sure I wish she would marry him, and have done with it," continues Hugh, yawning. "Great



Sawney! I'm getting dog-tired of seeing his ugly mug about the house; seems to be in every room at once too, like a bird; he's a thundering lout, that's what he is!"

"If you *will* be so Quixotically generous as to bring all your wife's relations, like a hornet's nest, about your ears, you must take the consequences," I say, a little maliciously.

Time does wonders, and time and Lord Stockport succeeded in softening our Dolly's tender scruples.

"One cannot always consult one's own feelings in this world," I overheard her saying one day to Hugh, "else, (with a gentle sigh) things would be very different, but for poor Stockport's sake — he really is getting so miserably unsettled and fretful — ah, I know some one who can feel for him; some one who was not *too* patient himself once, a hundred years ago — that I am afraid it will tell upon his health; *that* would not be fair, would it? and so" — (with down dropped eyes and a blush). And so a judicious compromise has been effected between the bridegroom's eagerness, and the bride's filial devotion. He had clamoured for April, and she had stickled for December. June is a happy mean between the two, and June it is to be.

I had begged that the wedding might be a very quiet one; the idea of a great gathering, of all the onerous duties of mistress of a great house coming upon me for the first time, of feasting and merry-making in the midst of my deep mourning was utterly repellent to me. But I am overruled by my mamma, as I have been on many other occasions.

"Life is too short to be spent in vain repinings,



my dear," she says to me one morning, after we have been indulging in a mild wrangle on the subject; "there are duties owing to the living as well as to the dead, and we should not selfishly neglect the former for the latter."

I make no answer, but bend my head in silence over my work. "It seems to me," pursues the old lady, rather exasperated by my silence, "that there is something *unchristian* in such exaggerated grief — it is a sure argument of an ill-regulated mind. You seem to forget that there is such a virtue as Resignation, one of the most beautiful of Christian graces, or that our Heavenly Father knows what is best for us!" Lady Lancaster has none of her son's shyness in mentioning the Deity. On the contrary, her Heavenly Father plays a large part in her conversation, particularly when she is angry.

"It's very easy to be resigned to one's Heavenly Father, when he does nothing to vex one," I cry passionately, ignoring the fifth commandment, or perhaps imagining that it does not apply to parents-in-law. The Dowager rises very stiffly, and makes her flat back flatter than ever.

"If you are going to be blasphemous, my dear," she says, "I have nothing more to say; we must drop the subject, if you please!" and she sweeps out of the room with dignity. Dropping the subject means that I apologize, and that the old lady gets her own way. And so March, and April, and May — most tearful and sweetest of the daughters of the year — steal past us; march quickly by to join the other dead months and years; go over to the majority as the Romans have it. And there comes a sultry day in early June — a



day when my sister's life began to open, and mine, I think, to close.

"'Happy the bride that the sun shines on,' the proverb says, doesn't it?" asks Hugh that morning, lying staring lazily out of window at the pale blue sky, and the Scotch firs, and the rooks cawing and flapping about their windy homes; "if that's the case, I'm afraid you have not a chance of coming in for much luck, have you, Nell? You had not a ha'porth of sun from 'Dearly Beloved,' to 'Amazement.'"

I am up and dressed already.

"Proverbs often tell lies," I say carelessly. "'Honesty is the best policy;' 'It is better to be good than pretty;' 'Early birds pick the worm;' what can be greater fiction than those three?"

"We shall have the house to ourselves to-night, Nell!" says Hugh cheerfully, "that'll be a comfort, won't it?"

"Ye-es," I say rather doubtfully, "at least do you know, Hugh, I sometimes wish that somebody would take it into their head to marry your mother; some meek-minded old gentleman that she could rule with a rod of iron, and make muffetees for, and read 'A Voice from the Pit,' or 'A few Plain Words about Sinners,' to."

Hugh bursts out into a loud haw! haw!

"Oh! I say, Nell! too bad! what's the Mater been doing now? slanging you, or giving you good little books to read?"

"A little of both, perhaps!" I say, laughing.

Wentworth Church is a mile from Wentworth House; just outside the park it stands; ugly, square-windowed, ivy-less. Sir Hugh's work-people and tenants have been as zealous in doing honour to his



sister-in-law, as if she were a real Lancaster. There is a big arch at the first gate; a bigger at the second, and, a biggest at the church gate.

June has such a wealth of roses that she can spare a good many to scatter under Dolly's feet, without missing them. The deer raise their slender heads to look surprisedly at these monstrosities which have sprung up like mushrooms after rain, and then go leaping lightly away through the deep bracken.

The churchyard is full of people; there is quite a struggle for the vantage-ground of the high flat tombstones, that give one always an idea of grim ghastly boxes. The children have had their faces washed, as if it were Sunday; the women are bobbing curtseys, and the men pulling shaggy forelocks, as we float and rustle up the scarlet cloth put to the chancel-door. There are twelve bridesmaids — six innocents in blue, and six in pink. It has been a work of some labour and thought to get that spinster dozen together.

Female friends Dolly has none, holding — was it Cowper's opinion? — that women's friendships were leagues of folly and interest; and it has been difficult to collect, at least in a country neighbourhood, twelve young ladies of fit standing, to walk behind Lady Stockport to the altar. It is rather a scratch team, after all; we have been obliged to eke it out with an old maid and a child.

Little De Laney is best man; not that he has any peculiar affection or admiration for the bridegroom, as indeed he told me afterwards that he was "the biggest fool out," but because Lord Stockport once shed the radiance of his presence over the corps of which De Laney is a member.



A bishop in very clear lawn sleeves and painfully thin legs, with two High Church Rectors, officiate. They all read very fast, and leave out as much as they possibly can, so that whatever else it is, at least the service cannot be said to be tedious. And so the "august ceremony," as the county newspapers said next day, is consummated, and Dolly draws a sigh of relief. I think she is glad that the costly brittle cup has reached her red lips in safety at last. And then we all get into our carriages and bowl home, with the "ugly duckling" transformed within the last quarter of an hour into a swan leading the way.

"This is the room we danced in last year, isn't it?" Lord Capel says to me, at breakfast.

"Yes," I say; "it looks so different without its furniture, doesn't it?"

Lady Lancaster, like the fisherman's wife, Ilsabil, has had her own will, and the gathering is as large as even she could wish.

Looking down the long table, on either side of the forest of ferns, and flowers, and pyramidal fruit, I see happy people — *these* in Elise-ian bonnets — *those* in Poole-ian coats, laughing and talking nonsense.

The bridegroom is doing neither; he is eating "poulet au truffes" and looking solemnly amorous, and amorously solemn. I fancy that his impending speech is weighing on his mind, and he is wishing that a fellow might be allowed to get married without having, as his phrase is, to jaw about it. Happiest, noisiest, most gorgeous of apparel, frequentest of laugh among the guests are the Coxes; all except Mortimer Spencer De Laney, behind whose barnacles the bitter tear of disappointment keeps swelling.



The Coxes are not presentable, certainly, but I insisted on their being asked. I have a kindness for them; they were good to my poor Dick.

"There have been a good many changes since then," says Lord Capel, pleasantly, thinking of my marriage.

"Indeed, there have!" I say, with a slight shudder.

"Everyone that was here last year is here now!" he continues, looking round on the assembled faces; "with one exception."

"Who is the exception, Capel?" asks De Laney, who is on the other side of me, "proves the rule, doesn't it, eh?"

"No, nonsense! M'Gregor, don't you recollect poor M'Gregor?"

"Why *poor*?" I asked, trying to smile; for not being here?"

"Haven't you heard? oh, I thought you were sure to; I'm sorry I mentioned the subject."

"Why?" I ask, hoarsely.

"Oh, because it's a shame to introduce melancholy subjects on an occasion like this; bad omen, you know. Stockport would not thank me."

"You had better go on, now you have begun," says De Laney, "or we shall think it something worse than it is."

"Well then, poor fellow! he is dead! I heard it a day or two ago, from a man who was quartered on the same station with him; died of fever and ague at Lahore! very sad thing! nobody he cared a straw about near him."

"Dead!" cries Violet Coxe, overhearing, in her hard loud voice; "poor M'Gregor! Lord! how sorry I am!"



The bride suddenly rises from her seat, and comes rushing over to me.

"For God's sake, don't expose yourself!"

I hear her whispering very eagerly, and then there sounds a loud buzzing in my ears; a deadly sickness comes over me, and I faint away, as I fainted away five months ago, in those strong arms that will never more embrace any bride but corruption.

"The knight's bones are dust,  
And his good sword rust,  
His soul is with the saints, I trust."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JUNE 7th, 186— I am coming to the last in my series of pictures from a life that has been, alas!

"Failure, crowning failure, failure from end to end."

My foolish little tale has been dull enough in the telling, I'm afraid; it was not dull in the acting, Heaven knows! It is two years and a half ago now, since that wintry night when, in my wicked madness, I wanted to sacrifice soul and body to my one, my only love; since he said to me, but in tenderer, more impassioned words,

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honour more."

Since then, I have been sorry for my sin; certainly I have tried to be. I have been a good wife to Hugh too; I think he would tell you so, if you asked him. It has been up-hill, tiring work, and I have often got out of breath, but it is nearly over now. Yes, my friends, I ask you to bid me God speed! for I am go-



ing a very far journey, "*je vais chercher un grand peut-être.*"

I am dying, and the great smith who strikes off all fetters, is knocking off mine. In the Litany, you know, we pray for deliverance from sudden death, and my prayer has certainly been answered! Never did anyone leave the world with more lagging, lingering feet, than I am doing. I am able to watch the steps of my own dissolution. My beauty and my strength are gone from me: they were sorry to go, I think; they went so slowly and I shall not be long after them now.

Until last winter, I always thought I should live to be an old woman, — like my mother-in-law, perhaps; bony, grenadier-like, hirsute of lip, and baggy of cheek,

"With a little hoard of maxims,  
Preaching down a daughter's heart."

But about last Christmas, the idea struck me, came home to me, that never should gray hairs and I make acquaintance; that my head would be laid down in its ruddy glory, before very long, in the chilly sombre vault of the Lancasters. (Oh, if they would but lay me among mine own people!) I looked very well, certainly — Hugh's men friends complimented him (so he told me) on his wife's beauty; such rosy cheeks I had too; I, who used to be pale to a proverb; and my rosy cheeks did not come out of the rouge pot, as the Dowager's wigged compeers curiously hinted to that irate old matron.

But surely, surely I was getting oddly, unaccountably thin: my rings took to slipping off my fingers, and rolling into remote corners, and all "me frocks," like Glorvina's, of lovelorn memory, "had to be took in."



Also I somehow stopped very often, and leant against the carved banisters; as I went up the shallow, broad oak steps of the grand staircase. One day I spoke out my thought.

"Mother," I said (Hugh liked me to call her mother), "don't you think I'm getting to look very like Jane Stevens, that died of consumption at the West Lodge, last year?"

"Nonsense! my dear," answered the old lady, very hastily, "you should not get fanciful; young people of your age often look delicate in such cold weather; don't imagine anything so silly!"

But she was very much flurried as she spoke, her old nose got red, and two big tears dropped on to her eternal knitting. I asked no more questions; I said no more on the subject, but from that day, I knew that my fate was sealed. So I was going to die; going to be erased from the number of the warm, kindly living; going to be numbered with the cold, cold dead, whose battle is over, whose race is run! In their successive generations,

"God's finger touched them and they slept."

Soon, that dread finger would be laid upon me, and there could be no shrinking from under it. I could see quite plainly a new tablet over our pew, in Wentworth's dark old church: I could read the black letters traced distinctly on the white marble, "*Hic jacet Eleonora.*"

The next Lady Lancaster would be spelling out the Latin words, instead of minding her prayers, would be picturing to herself this dead Eleanora to whom but two-and-twenty summers had been vouchsafed.



But where should I myself be at that time? Oh, thought full of unspeakable awe! How that prayer comes home to the souls of all us miserable sinners; a thousand-fold more, then, to those of us, who are on the verge of that dark, dark flood!

“Rex tremendæ majestatis  
Qui salvandos salvas gratis  
Salva me, fons pietatis.”

“King of majesty tremendous,  
Who dost free salvation send us,  
Fount of Pity! then befriend us.”

Oh, noble verse! simple utterance of a soul trembling and abased to the dust before that King of kings, that Lord of lords! Those must have been holy men, those monks, who put together those grand words. No doubt they agonized to enter at that strait gate; no doubt they sinned, and suffered, and wept as we do now; and oh! in mercy let us hope that they are —

“Where God for aye  
Shall wipe away  
All tears from every eye.”

I wondered much within myself whether I were going to a good place — I rather feared not; I certainly had no well-grounded hope that I was. Heaven had shared but too few of my thoughts hitherto.

All the love and aspirations I had to bestow had been squandered on that intense earthly passion which seemed to be eating up body and soul. It was too late to mend now, but I was sorry it had been so.

Yet still, on that one subject which had dominated my whole life, I felt easier and more comfortable than I had been for a long time. I no longer wept in secret, nor felt a gnawing, wearing, mighty longing to



see that one face again. He was gone from me but a very little way; just —

“From this room into the next.”

I had known I could not live without him, and I was not going to do so. God was very good and pitying; he was going to release me from the long pain of existence, and “through the grave and gate of death” I should pass to my beloved; should see his hero face immortal *then* in its beauty, so that “decay’s effacing fingers” could never sweep its hues.

“You’ll be all right again, when the spring comes round, darling little girl!” Hugh would say to me, cheerily, now and then, and would smooth my hair with his kind brown hand, and I always said:

“Yes, dear old fellow, I dare say I shall!” though my all right was different from his.

Would it not be all right, would it not be passing well with me, when I had gone away with great gladness to be with my beloved for evermore?

“*June 20th.* — I am going so fast! oh, so fast! These are the last words I shall ever write; it is hard, laboursome to me to hold the pencil, but I do not want to leave the story of my poor life incomplete; incompleter at least than the story of all lives must be. Some other hand must put ‘Finis’ I know.

“It is night, and I am sitting in my old dad’s chair, watching the stars silently taking their allotted places in the firmament. I have been gazing up into those depths of air unfathomable by mortal eyes, wondering how far up in those measureless tracts of ether, or whether in that direction at all, lie the spreading fields



of light, rise the walls and towers, shine the golden streets of the holy city. 'A land where the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick.'

"What a pleasant thought! That text never struck me particularly when I was well. I suppose now that I am so full of aches and pains it comes home to me more. Oh God! *am* I going there? If I could but know for certain!

"'In my father's house are many mansions.' Perhaps that text has something to say to me; into one of the lowest of those mansions, perhaps into the very lowest of all, the Great Householder, who is ever holding his Marriage Feast, and calling thither whoso hungers, and is weary, may let me creep in, even me; for am I not weary, most weary? I have been trying (oh, vain endeavour) to picture to myself that land of unpictured, *unpicturable* passionless bliss — trying, with narrow human brain, to compass and take in the idea of the ineffable joys of the blessed souls of the just, in those unfading abodes which they have climbed up the steep ladder of faith to, at last; trying to conjure up before my mental vision —

"'The shores where tideless sleep the seas of time,  
Soft by the City of the Saints of God!'

"Oh Lord Jesus Christ! let me be in that city by this time to-morrow night! Grant me entrance there! Open to me when in fear and trembling I knock!"

FINIS.











**F.X.BEE.**  
kgl. Hofbuchbinder  
in  
**MÜNCHEN**  
Lederergasse N. 25.







Broughton, Rhoda,

Cometh up as a flower an autobiography

Leipzig 1867

P.o.angl. 38 o-1

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10745029-1